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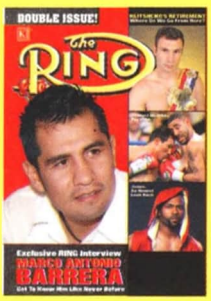

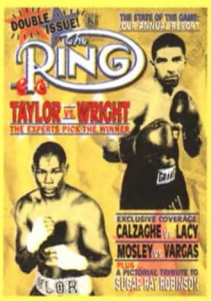

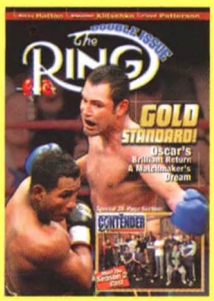

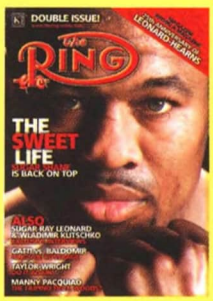

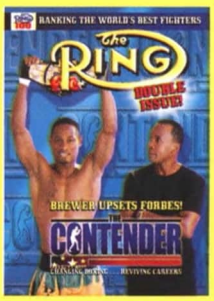

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[Opening Shot]

NOW, DOESN'T THAT FEEL BETTER THAN STURM'S FISTS?

Noe Tulio Gonzalez Alcoba's corner couldn't do much to stop the 12-round assault by WBA middleweight titleholder Felix Sturm in Stuttgart, Germany, on June 30, but they did their best between rounds to take the Uruguay fighter's mind off his hurts. Alcoba bravely came forward all night, but there was nothing he could do to stave off his first loss after 14 wins.

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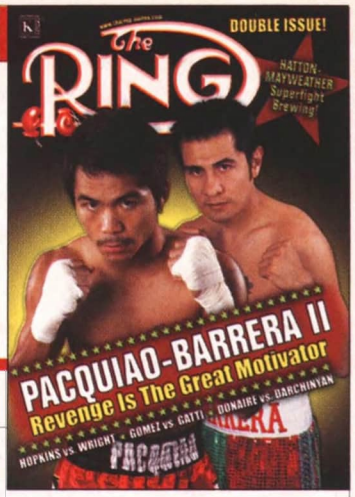

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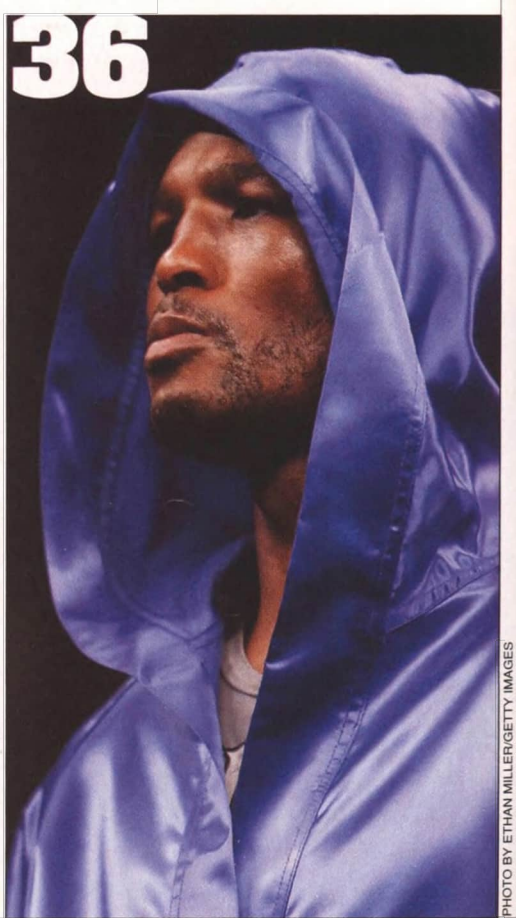

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The RING

The toughest part of participating in this issue's special section, "10 RING Writers Recall 'The Greatest Fight I Ever Saw'" *(page 51)*, was narrowing it down to a single fight. I drew up a lengthy list and kept whittling away until just 10 remained, from which, after considerable navel gazing, I selected the first fight between Matthew Saad Muhammad and Marvin Johnson.

Actually, I couldn't have gone wrong regardless of which fight I'd decided to write about. Consequently, I figured it might be fun to share the nine other fights with readers. If there seems to be a bit of a Philadelphia bias to my list, so be it. With subjective matters such as this, you've got to be true to yourself. The fights are listed in chronological order.

Archie Moore KO 11 Yvon Durelle, Montreal, December 10, 1958: This was the one that hooked me. It was past my bedtime, but when I heard my father and his buddies whooping and hollering, I crept out of bed and peeked into the living room to see what all the ruckus was about. I was allowed to stay and watch Moore stage arguably the greatest comeback of all-time. It's been a long, strange trip from then to now, but that was the starting point.

Gypsy Joe Harris KO 7 Kitten Hayward, Philadelphia, October 10, 1966: Hayward was the number-one welterweight in the world, while fellow Philadelphian Harris was a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon. I purchased a ringside seat in the fifth row, and when Gypsy Joe came off the canvas to stop Kitten, I suddenly found myself on the ring apron in Gypsy's corner. I still don't know how I got there.

Bennie Briscoe D 10 Cyclone Hart, Philadelphia, November 18, 1975: Two Philly legends slugging it out toe-to-toe for local bragging rights in front of a big crowd at the Spectrum. How good was it? Well, the British *Boxing News* selected it as the second-best fight of the year. The winner? "The Thrilla In Manila."

Marvin Hagler KO 3 Thomas Hearns, Las Vegas, April 15, 1985: Halfway into the first round, I realized I was standing on my press seat screaming into a tape recorder. You already know the rest.

Roberto Duran W 12 Iran Barkley, Atlantic City, February 24, 1989: A couple of buddies and I drove through a blizzard to get to A.C., and all the way I kept thinking we'd be the only ones at the fight. But the Convention Center was SRO, and our reward for the perilous slog was a legend's last great performance—made even more exhilarating by the totally ballistic Panamanian radio announcer sitting directly in back of me.

Julio Cesar Chavez KO 12 Meldrick Taylor, Las Vegas, March 17, 1990: Like every other Philadelphia fight fan, my stomach was in a pretzel knot from the opening bell until the moment Richard Steele stopped the greatest fight of the decade with two ticks to go. I'm still not sure whether he made the right decision or not.

Erik Morales W 12 Marco Antonio Barrera, Las Vegas, February 19, 2000: This is the one I pop in the VCR whenever I need a reminder of why I do what I do.

Bernard Hopkins KO 12 Felix Trinidad, New York City, September 29, 2001: Hopkins cashed every wolf ticket he ever sold, giving one of the greatest performances in middleweight history.

Somsak Sithchatchawal KO 10 Mahyar Monshipour, Levallois, March 18, 2006: Just because I began my career on a typewriter, it doesn't mean I don't love the Internet. Thank you, youtube. This fight was freaking unreal.

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Editor-in-Chief

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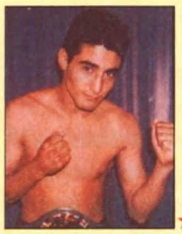

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★ Vito Antuofermo
★ Angelo Dundee
★ Angel Manfredy
★ Terry Norris
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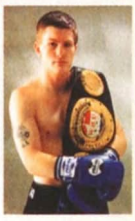

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Art Imitates Life

Irish Bobby Cassidy was 26 years old on the January night in 1971 when he sat in a dressing room in Miami Beach and reflected wistfully on a points defeat to future Hall of Famer Luis Rodriguez. "Hang in there, kid. You won the fight," Muhammad Ali, who was a friend of Rodriguez, told him. Cassidy remembered those words. Despite climbing to number one in the light heavyweight rankings by 1975, however, he was never given an opportunity to fight for the title, a fact that he has been unable to wholly reconcile about his career. "I fought five men who challenged for the title and beat four of them," he told a recent interviewer. "I think I deserved a shot."

This sentiment and the alcoholism that he battled for years were central themes in a poignant play, superbly written by his son, Bobby Cassidy Jr., which sold out twice on its two-day run off Broadway in June. *Kid Shamrock* was directed by Gary Morgan (who worked for many years alongside former WBC featherweight titleholder Juan LaPorte in the New York City Housing Authority) and starred Irish cruiserweight and heavyweight Seamus McDonagh in the title role. Patrick Joseph Connolly, who appeared in the final episode of *The Sopranos*, co-starred, and, along with a fine supporting cast that included Shane McCaughey (who gave a powerful portrayal of young Kid Shamrock), Shannon Lower, Ron Ross, and David Morgan, they brought Cassidy Jr.'s words to life, a gratifying experience for the onetime associate editor of THE RING.

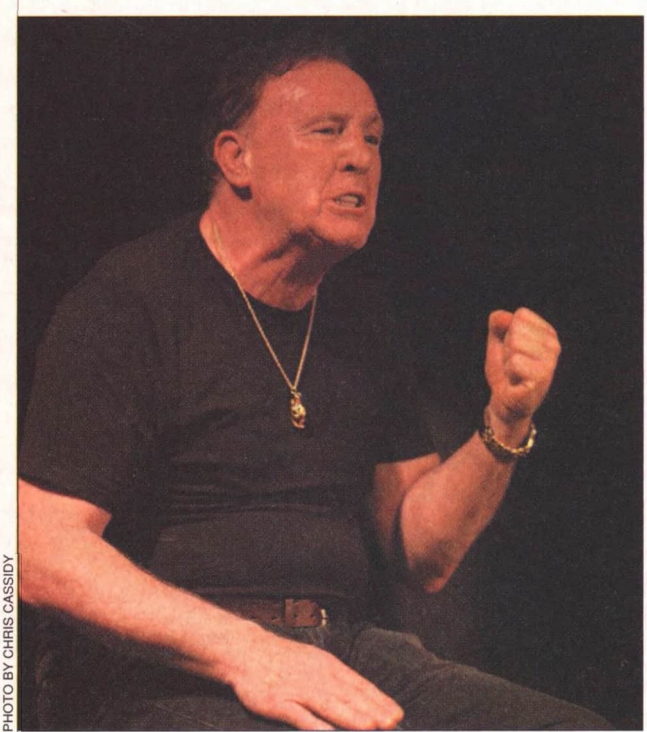


PHOTO BY CHRIS CASSIDY

Cassidy during his* Requiem For A Heavyweight *monologue

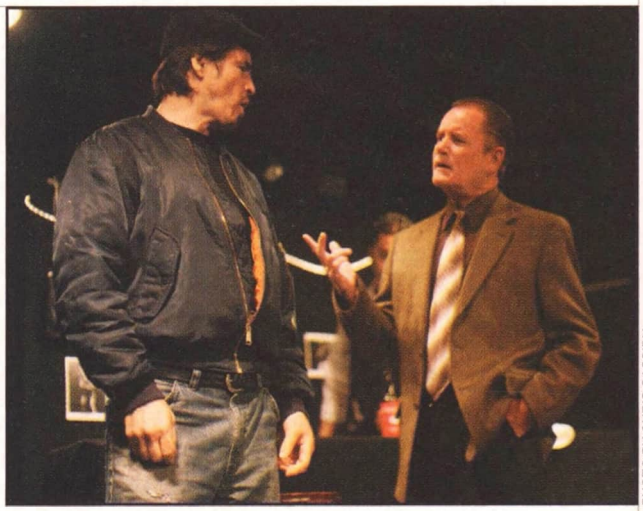


PHOTO BY CHRIS CASSIDY

McDonagh (as Kid Shamrock) and Connolly in off-Broadway play

"My father fought and beat some of the best fighters in the world and became a contender. Yet when he retired from the ring, it wasn't the punches that hurt most, it was the fact that he was never given a title shot," Cassidy Jr. reiterated. "The play was based on his career and his struggle with alcoholism and it's been in my heart for years."

(Cassidy writes about his father's 1977 fight with Christy Elliott in our special section, "The Greatest Fight I Ever Saw," beginning on page 51 of this issue.)

McDonagh, who finished his career in 1991 with a 19-3-1 (14) record, was able to draw on his own life experience to lend authenticity to the central character. "I've done some acting before, but only bit parts, so this is the first time I've been on stage, and everyone else has been looking up to me to carry the show," said McDonagh, who runs a shoeshine business in San Francisco. Like Cassidy, he has had to fight an ongoing battle against alcohol, so the play offered redemption for him too.

Kid Shamrock was the highlight of *A Night Of Boxing Off Broadway*, which featured a reading by Ron Ross from his book *Bummy Davis vs. Murder, Inc.*, a multimedia boxing presentation by Chris Cassidy, the fighter's younger son, and an informative and humorous roundtable discussion chaired by Showtime's Steve Farhood involving LaPorte, former world lightweight and light welterweight champion Carlos Ortiz, ex-heavyweight contender Renaldo Snipes, and Mark Breland, the former WBA welterweight titleholder. In a triumphant cameo, Cassidy, now 63, performed a monologue from *Requiem For A Heavyweight*. He combined passion with a delicate expression of the words, a fitting finale for a fine production.

—Brian Doogan

New Fight For Micky

Fighter-turned-trainer Micky Ward and rapper-turned-actor/producer Mark Wahlberg have joined forces for more than the Ward biopic called *The Fighter*, starring Wahlberg and Matt Damon. Ward and Wahlberg have also teamed up in an effort to support and assist inner-city children.

Ward formed The Team Micky Ward Charitable Foundation last year when he and former foe Arturo Gatti attended the fourth annual Chicago Labor's Fight Night. Wahlberg, an avid boxing fan, began the Mark Wahlberg Youth Foundation in 2001. Now the two foundations will work together on a series of fundraising events, which began with the second annual Boston Labor's Fight Night on July 25 at the Roxy. They also plan to be involved when Chicago Labor hosts its next Fight Night, later this year.

"I may be retired from boxing, but I haven't stopped fighting," said Ward. "Anyone that's ever seen me fight knows that I gave 100 percent inside the boxing ring, and I will continue to do so for this tremendous cause ... this is a fight we won't lose."

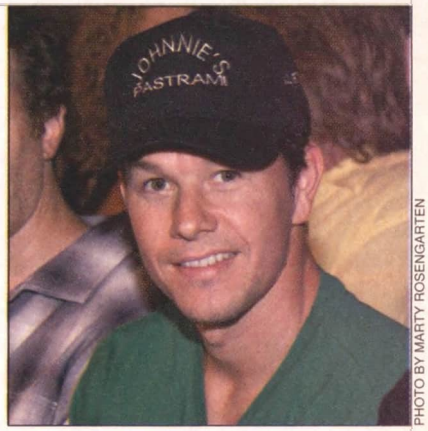


PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Wahlberg: Ringside for Gomez-Gatti in Atlantic City

Hugo Corro, 1953-2007

It's easy to lose Hugo Corro's brief middleweight world championship reign. It came wedged between the reigns of Hall of Famers Carlos Monzon and Marvelous Marvin Hagler, and lasted only just a little more than a year.

Corro died in Mendoza, Argentina, on June 15, reportedly from a pulmonary illness. He was 53. Corro fought the bulk of his career from 1973-81, followed by a six-fight comeback in the late-'80s, finally ending with a 50-7-2 (26) record.

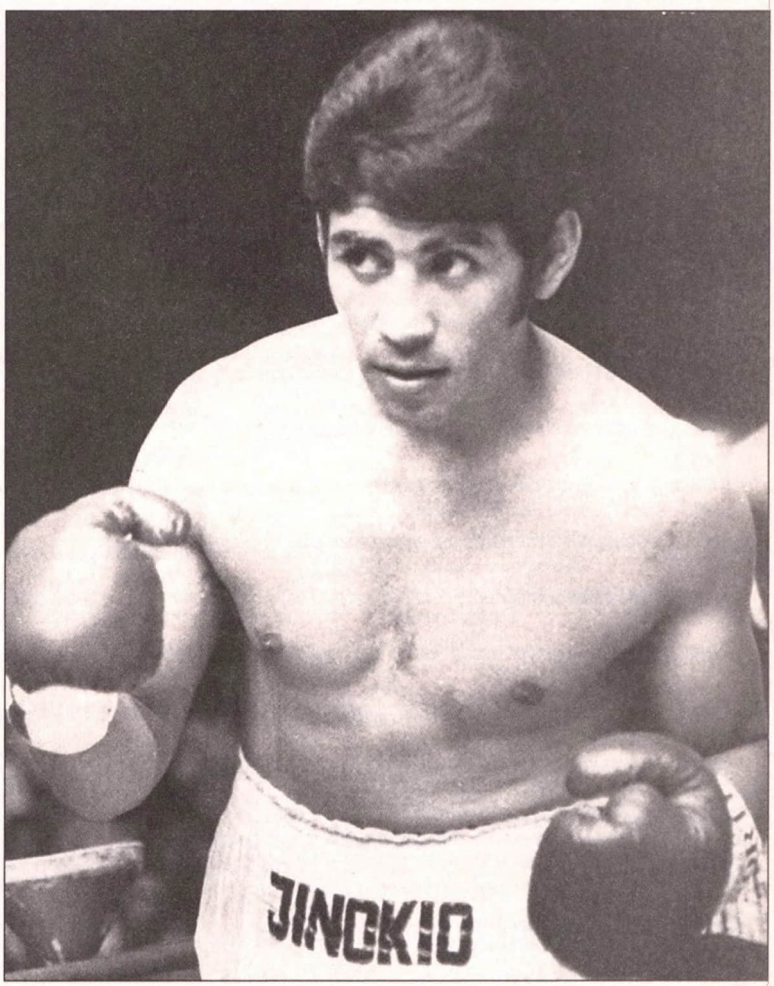
Corro's biggest victory came on April 22, 1978, when he captured the middleweight title with a 15-round decision over Rodrigo Valdes, who had won the vacant middleweight crown following Monzon's retirement. Corro made easy work of Valdes, who, after a series of punishing battles with Monzon and Bennie Briscoe, was an open target for Corro's jab. Nonetheless, it was considered a major upset at the time.

Corro successfully defended the title twice, winning 15-round decisions over Ronnie Harris and Valdes. In his third defense, he lost a split-decision and the championship to Vito Antuofermo, in June 1979, in Monte Carlo, Monaco.

Corro was from the Mendoza school of boxing, according to Carlos Irusta, THE RING's South America correspondent. He'd jab and move, jab and move, which made some of his bouts a little tedious to watch.

"He couldn't replace Monzon," Irusta said. "When he lost to Antuofermo, people never pardoned him. He was a middleweight champion like Monzon, who made 14 defenses. Yet when the Antuofermo fight was over, Corro was smiling. The people never liked him because he was too shiny and a man of few words. But although Corro was not marketable, he was a very good boxer."

—Joe Santoliquito



Corro had the unenviable task of following Monzon

TV Fights of the Month

Compiled By Martin Mulcahey

DATE	WINNER/LOSER	NETWORK	DIVISION	SIGNIFICANCE	MATCHUP	RESULT
6/14/07	Kid Diamond W 12 Miguel Huerta	Versus	l	C+	C+	B-
Fantastic fight spoiled by horrendous decision. The shine is officially off this Diamond						
6/14/07	Hassim Rahman W 10 Taurus Sykes	Versus	h	C	C	D-
The only thing still solid about Rahman is his nickname						
6/15/07	Lucian Bute W 12 Sakio Bika	ESPN2	sm	B	B	B-
I'd welcome another Bute call						
6/15/07	Yori Boy Campas W 10 Billy Lyell	Telefutura	jm	D	D	C
Campas reaches 99, fights not birthdays						
6/16/07	Paul Malignaggi W 12 Lovemore Ndou	HBO	jw	B	B	B-
Malignaggi boxes circles around Ndou, despite a hairdo that would make Jorge Paez blush						
6/20/07	Peter Manfredo W 10 David Banks	ESPN2	sm	C+	C-	C
A disinterested Manfredo walks through copious right hands to grind down Banks						
6/22/07	Juan Manuel Lopez KO 1 Giovanni Andrade	Telefutura	jf	C-	D-	F
Forget farcical ending, writers must decide whether to compare Lopez to a young Trinidad or Cotto						
6/22/07	Troy Browning W 10 Julio Cesar Garcia	ESPN2	jm	C	C	C+
Has your father ever told you his generation's boxers were better than yours? Here's the proof						
6/23/07	**Ricky Hatton KO 4 Jose Luis Castillo**	**HBO**	**jw**	**A**	**A**	**B-**
A major Mexican champ hasn't been this emasculated since the original "Hit Man" destroyed Pipino Cuevas						
6/27/07	Yusaf Mack W 10 Jose Vasquez	ESPN2	sm	C	C	C+
Mack shakes off rust, then Vasquez						
6/29/07	Victor Ortiz KO 1 Maximino Cuevas	Telefutura	w	C-	D	B
Intensity of the close contest punctuated by exchange of low blows in fifth round						
6/29/07	Darnell Wilson KO 11 Emmanuel Nwodo	ESPN2	c	B	A-	B+
Brutal kayo in fight destined for heavy rotation on ESPN Classic						
6/30/07	Evander Holyfield W 10 Lou Savarese	PPV	h	C+	C	B
Entertaining fight, but shouldn't there be a law against the headliner's age exceeding the PPV price?						
7/06/07	Martin Honorio W 10 Joe Morales	Telefutura	jl	C	C-	B-
Point deductions keep Morales close, Honoria making habit of winning close fights						
7/06/07	Nate Campbell KO 6 Wilson Alcorro	ESPN2	l	B-	C	C+
Campbell's not the best lightweight in the world, but he might be the most dangerous						
7/07/07	Joachim Alcine W 12 Travis Simms	Showtime	jm	B+	B+	C+
Fans who did not fall asleep in the first seven rounds were given compelling ending						
7/07/07	Nonito Donaire KO 5 Vic Darchinyan	Showtime	fl	A-	B+	A-
Darchinyan brings the phrase "running into a punch" to life in spectacular fashion						
7/07/07	Wladimir Klitschko KO 6 Lamon Brewster	HBO	h	A-	B	D
Referee stops fights on trainer's advice, making him the only person listening to McGirt's instructions						
7/11/07	Joel Julio KO 8 Cornelius Bundrage	ESPN2	jm	C	B-	B
Boxing delivers powerpunching, knockdowns, blood, guts, cuts, and kayo to ESPY Award show						
7/13/07	Francisco Lorenzo W 10 Baudel Cardena	Telefutura	jl	C-	C-	C
Lorenzo remains borderline contender and best gatekeeper at 130						
7/13/07	Allan Green KO 1 Darrel Woods	ESPN2	sm	C+	C	C+
If Green missed with a right, we didn't see it						
7/14/07	John Duddy KO 10 Alessio Furlan	PPV	m	C+	C	C
Irish contender goes after European journeyman after depleting America's stock						
7/14/07	Roy Jones W 12 Anthony Hanshaw	PPV	lh	B-	B-	B-
Fading Jones beats another unranked boxer; HBO pays millions for this five years ago						
7/14/07	Kermit Cintron KO 2 Walter Matthysse	HBO	w	B+	B-	B-
Matthysse wears Argentine soccer jersey into ring; Cintron kicks him around						
7/14/07	Alfonso Gomez KO 7 Arturo Gatti	HBO	w	B	B	C+
Gatti's warrior reputation forces him to endure excessive punishment before fight is stopped						
7/14/07	Paul Williams W 12 Antonio Margaritto	HBO	w	A-	A	B+
Reversal of fortunes: Williams becomes most avoided contender						

Category Explanation: "Significance"—The importance of the bout to the division and the fighters' futures; "Matchup"—The quality of the fighters and the prefight determination of how their styles will mesh; "Result"—How the bout turned out, from the viewer's perspective.

(RING championship fights in **bold** type)

Division key: h—heavyweight; c—cruiserweight; lh—light heavyweight; sm—super middleweight; m—middleweight; jm—junior middleweight; w—welterweight; jw—junior welterweight; l—lightweight; jl—junior lightweight; f—featherweight; jf—junior featherweight; b—bantamweight; jb—junior bantamweight; fl—flyweight; jfl—junior flyweight; s—strawweight

Network key: PPV—Pay-Per-View; Show—Showtime; FOXSN—Fox Sports Net;Uni—Univision; Telef—Telefutura; Telem—Telemundo; HBO L—HBO Latino; Versus

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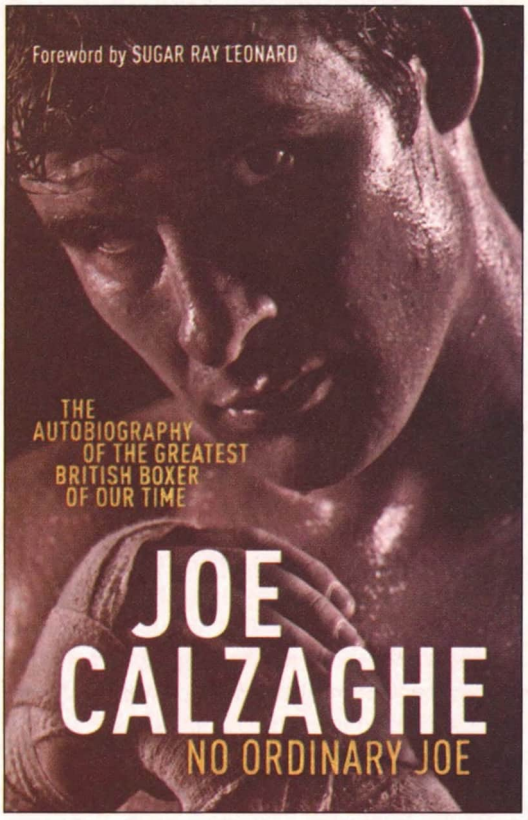

No Ordinary Joe: The Autobiography Of The Greatest British Fighter Of Our Time (Century Books, 254 pages, hardcover, £18.99) is the sort of pleasant, clean-cut autobiography that one would expect from a guy like Joe Calzaghe. Despite the book's title, Calzaghe *is* an ordinary Joe. How else can you describe someone whose favorite singer is David Coverdale of Whitesnake?

Written in collaboration with Brian Doogan, a *London Sunday Times* writer and longtime contributor to THE RING, Calzaghe comes off as a likeable, unassuming bloke. His personality wasn't formed by the sort of poverty or gang violence that seems *de rigueur* for fighters. Instead, Calzaghe comes from a loving family, he gets along with his dad, and he grew up in a nice, although somewhat chilly, town. He was distracted for a few fights because of a divorce and he had some managerial problems, but other than that, life has been pretty good for Calzaghe. There are actually a few pages of the book devoted to the time in third grade when some bullies picked on him, as if Calzaghe couldn't think of anything juicy from his past. Still, it's boxing that Calzaghe is concerned with, and he takes us through his career with humor and honesty.

As expected, much of the book deals with Calzaghe's 2006 victory over Jeff Lacy. When we're reminded of how Calzaghe was expected to lose to the iron-pumped Floridian, and he reveals that he nearly pulled out of the fight because of his chronically injured hands, his triumph seems all the more electrifying. Still, it's interesting that Calzaghe mentions how vulnerable Lacy seemed without his hometown backing. Luring Lacy to his backyard was obviously such a strong part of Calzaghe's ring psychology, it makes one wonder if he'll ever fight outside of his U.K. comfort zone.

Calzaghe is most engaging when he discusses his love of the sport. He's also refreshingly candid when it comes to describing his pre-fight jitters. Calzaghe is a cool performer in the ring, but when he's sitting around the hotel room, he can be as neurotic as a super model losing her lunch before a stroll on the runway. Calzaghe also offers some interesting comments regarding other fighters, such as Roy Jones, Mike Tyson, and Evander Holyfield. It's not major gossip; he just says what a lot of us are thinking.

If Johnny Tapia's recent autobiography felt like a walk through hell, Calzaghe's book feels like a friendly chat over a pint at your local pub. Ultimately, the book proves that a great fighter doesn't have to come from the mean streets of urban America. He could very well grow up in Wales, listening to Whitesnake.

—Don Stradley

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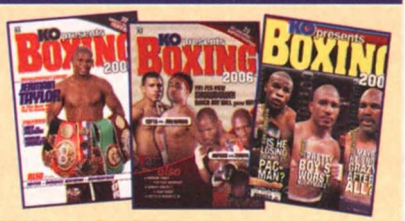

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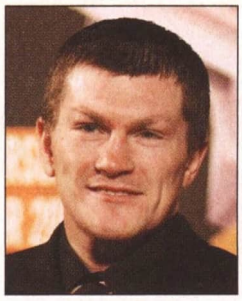
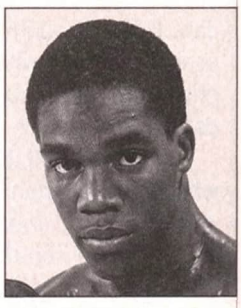
Outside the Ropes

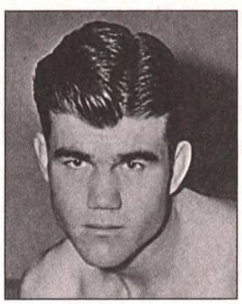
Junior welterweight champion **Ricky Hatton** visited Buckingham Palace in July, where the **Prince of Wales** presented him with a medal emblematic of being made a Member of the British Empire. "It's a day that will stay with me until the day I die," said Hatton, who admitted that the ceremony was "quite nerve-racking" ... The mother of a baby girl born in Wolverhampton, England, has named her daughter **Autumn Sullivan Corbett Fitzsimmons Jeffries Hart Burns Johnson Willard Dempsey Tunney Schmeling Sharkey Carnera Baer Braddock Louis Charles Walcott Marciano Patterson Johansson Liston Clay Frazier Foreman Brown**, after 25 former heavyweight champions. "The whole thing came about because my mum and dad are obsessed with boxing and have a daft sense of humor," said 33-year-old **Maria Brown** ... Heavyweight **Lou Savarese** plays Rico the serial killer in the horror film *Knock Knock*, which is expected to hit theaters later this year. "You have to get into the mode when you're acting," said Savarese. "With *Knock Knock* I had to be a killer, so I would imagine scenarios in my head that would anger me. Later, when I watched myself on film, it felt like an out-of-body experience" ... According to **Joe Koizumi**, THE RING's Asian correspondent, there was a reoccurrence of an old problem when one of the cornermen working with Filipino light flyweight **Juanito Rubillar** overstayed his visa in Japan and failed to return to the Philippines after **Ken Nakajima** stopped Rubillar in the fifth round on June 24. Apparently, the differences in currency values makes it very profitable for visiting Filipinos to illegally stay in Japan, work, and send their wages back to the Philippines. Several years ago, the Japan Boxing Commission banned Filipino boxers from fighting in Japan for this reason, but the ban was lifted when the JBC reached an agreement with the Philippine Games and Amusement Board to allow boxers ranked by the GAB to again fight in Japan ... Former IBF cruiserweight titleholder **"Koncrete" Kelvin Davis**, 29, suffered neck and back injuries after falling 30 feet off a narrow bridge while doing roadwork in Auckland, New Zealand, where he was scheduled to fight **Shane Cameron** in late-June. Davis, 24-6-1 (17), was forced to jump off the bridge to avoid an oncoming vehicle. According to the *Nevada Appeal*'s **Mike Houser**, the boxer landed flat on his back among dirt and rocks and remained unconscious for several hours. When he regained consciousness, he crawled up a 30-foot dirt hill, where he was spotted by a motorist who called an ambulance. "Nobody knew where I was," said Davis. "It was so far, but I just kept crawling and crawling." A few days after the accident, Davis underwent a successful 11-hour surgery. "The doctors said they'd never seen anybody fall like that and not end up dead of paralyzed," said Davis' father, **Roy Gains**. "He's up and walking" ... Former welterweight contender **Tommy Ayers**, 44, was charged with trafficking and possession of cocaine. He was working as boxing coach at the Mount Auburn Community Center at the time of his arrest, but has been placed on a leave of absence by the Cincinnati Recreational Commission, pending the outcome of his case. Ayers, who fought professionally from 1981 until 1990, compiled a 38-4 (32) record and briefly held the NABF 147-pound title ... Australian super featherweight titleholder **Ahmed Elomar**, 24, was detained in Lebanon in late-July on suspicion of being part of a terrorist cell. Elomar, 13-0-2 (9), last fought on October 26, 2006, in Brisbane, where he fought a two-round technical draw with **Pedro Malco** ... **Barry Hughes**, the manager of troubled Scottish featherweight **Scott Harrison**, was arrested following a disturbance at a Glasgow bar and charged with "possessing an offensive weapon" ... Former middleweight contender **Pete Mead**, 83, died on July 2 at the Skilcare Nursing Home in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Mead, who boxed professionally from 1942 until 1950, is best remembered for his thrilling battle with **Joey DeJohn** at Madison Square Garden in '49, when Mead survived two knockdowns to stop DeJohn in the seventh round. After he retired, Mead, 39-16-1 (12), wrote an autobiography titled *Blood, Sweat And Cheers* ... Former boxer, referee, and city councilman **Max Muravnich**, 102, died on June 25 in Meriden, Connecticut. Muravnich was born in Petrograd, Russia, emigrated to the United States in 1909 and started boxing in 1919. He helped establish a senior citizens center in Meriden, where he taught physical fitness classes for 15 years.



Hatton: Awarded MBE



Ayers: Accused of dealing cocaine



Mead: Dead at age 83

Quotable

"My dad made me box as a kid. At times I hated it; I just wanted to be out with my mates on the beer and chasing girls."

—Cruiserweight contender Enzo Maccarinelli, recalling his formative years as a novice boxer

"Anytime this happens, it's good for business."

—Joe Pecora, Fernando Vargas' business manager, following a press conference brawl between his client and Ricardo Mayorga

Ratings Analysis

For Period Ended July 23, 2007

Heavyweights: Lamon Brewster (eighth last issue) exits after his lackluster effort against number-one rated Wladimir Klitschko. Chris Byrd (ninth last issue) and Vladimir Virchis (10th last issue) each move up one spot. Tony Thompson debuts at 10.

Cruiserweights: Johnathon Banks (eighth last issue) drops to 10 due to a lack of quality opposition. Vadim Tokarev (ninth last issue) and Darnell Wilson (10th last issue) each advance one place.

Light Heavyweights: No changes.

Super Middleweights: Lucian Bute (sixth last issue) rises to four after a decision victory over Sakio Bika (10th last issue). Markus Beyer (fourth last issue) and Librado Andrade (fifth last issue) both drop one rung.

Middleweights: Sebastian Sylvester (ninth last issue) surges to seven after stopping Amin Asikainen (seventh last issue), who falls to eight. Sam Soliman (eighth last issue) drops to nine.

Junior Middleweights: Floyd Mayweather (third last issue) vacates 154 to continue at welterweight. Everyone rated four to seven moves up one slot. Joachim Alcine debuts at seven after his decision victory over Travis Simms (eighth last issue).

Welterweights: Paul Williams (10th last issue) jumps to two after beating Antonio Margarito (second last issue), who sinks to four. Everyone rated four through nine drops down one place.

Junior Welterweights: Jose Luis Castillo (second last issue) falls to six after being stopped by junior welter world champion Ricky Hatton. Paul Malignaggi debuts at three after decisioning Lovemore Ndou (fourth last issue), who falls to seven. Gavin Rees debuts at four after his decision over Souleymane M'Baye (fifth last issue). Demetrius Hopkins (seventh last issue) and Kendall Holt (eighth last issue) each drop two places.

Lightweights: Michael Katsidis (eighth last issue) rises to five, bumping everyone from five to eight down one place.

Junior Lightweights: No changes.

Featherweights: Nicky Cook (fifth last issue) plummets to 10 after getting stopped by Steven Luevano, who debuts at eight. Cook's fall enables everyone rated six through eight to move up one place. Jorge Linares debuts at nine after stopping Oscar Larios (ninth last issue), who retired.

Junior Featherweights: Ricardo Cordoba (third last issue) exits to fight at bantamweight. Somsak Sithchatchawal (fourth last issue) and Daniel Ponce De Leon (fifth last issue) move up one place each, while Steve Molitor (eighth last issue) jumps to five. Takalani Ndlovu (ninth last issue) bumps up to eight, while Poonsawat Kratingaenggym debuts at junior feather at nine. Miguel Roman (10th last issue) exits, replaced by Bernard Dunne.

Bantamweights: Ricardo Cordoba moves down from junior featherweight and enters bantamweight at six. Luis Perez moves up from junior bantam into bantamweight at seven. The reshuffling drops Genaro Garcia from seven to nine. Ratanachai Vorapin (sixth last issue) exits due to a lack of quality opponents. Poonsawat Kratingaenggym (ninth last issue) leaves to campaign at 122.

Junior Bantamweights: No changes.

Flyweights: Nonito Donaire debuts as the number-one flyweight after stopping Vic Darchinyan (second last issue), who drops to six. Daisuke Naito (eighth last issue) vaults to two after beating Pongsaklek Wonjongkam (first last issue), who drops to three. Takefumi Sakata (fifth last issue) moves to four after his decision over Roberto Vasquez (fourth last issue), who slides to seven. Brahim Asloum (sixth last issue) and Luis Maldonado (seventh last issue) each drop two places, and Jose Lopez moves down to 10. Koki Kameda exits the ratings.

Junior Flyweights: No changes.

Strawweights: Florante Condes debuts at three after upsetting Muhammad Rachman (third last issue), who falls to five. Condes' inclusion drops everyone from five to nine down one. Ronald Barrera (10th last issue) exits.

Pound-for-pound: Bernard Hopkins trades places with Winky Wright.

The Ring
"The Bible Of Boxing"

Pound-For-Pound

1. **Floyd Mayweather**
   Welterweight
2. **Manny Pacquiao**
   Junior Lightweight
3. **Rafael Marquez**
   Bantamweight
4. **Juan Manuel Marquez**
   Junior Lightweight
5. **Bernard Hopkins**
   Light Heavyweight
6. **Winky Wright**
   Middleweight
7. **Joe Calzaghe**
   Super Middleweight
8. **Marco Antonio Barrera**
   Junior Lightweight
9. **Ricky Hatton**
   Junior Welterweight
10. **Miguel Cotto**
    Welterweight

For weekly updated Ring ratings, go to **TheRing-online.com**

The Ring Ratings

For Period Ended July 23, 2007

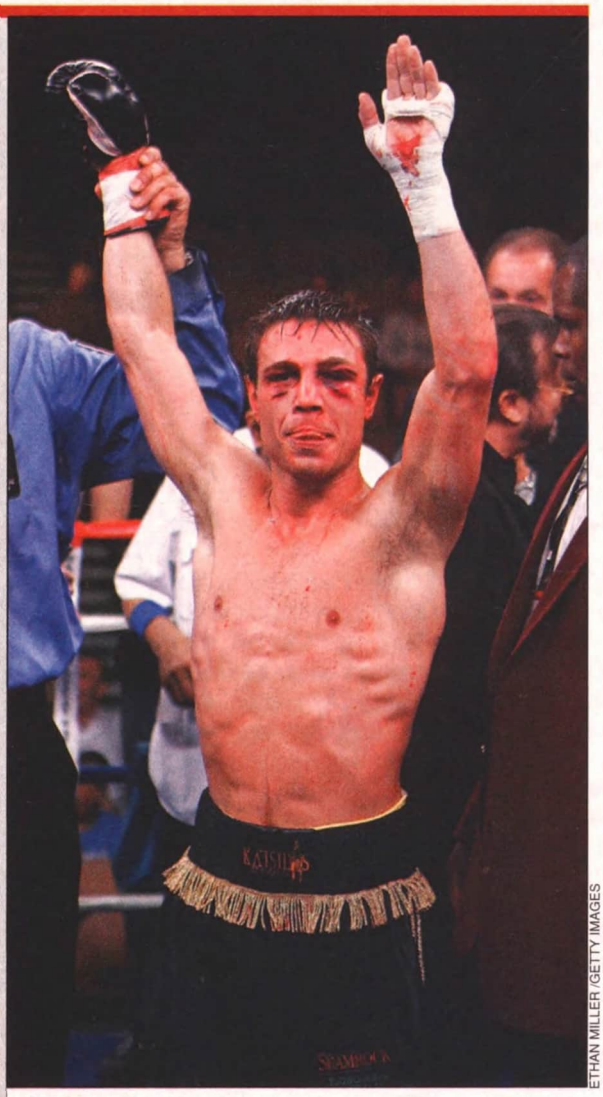
How Our Ratings Are Compiled

Fighters recognized as champions by The Ring are rated at the top of their division, with the top 10 contenders listed below.

Championship vacancies can be filled by winning a box-off between The Ring's number-one and number-two contenders, or, in certain instances, a box-off between our number-one and number-three contenders.

The only three occasions when a fighter will lose his championship status are when he retires, moves to another weight division, or is defeated in a championship bout.

The Ring Ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board, with the participation of The Ring Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world. To see the complete list of our panelists, click on "Ratings" at thering-online.com



ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Michael Katsidis advances from eight to five at lightweight

Heavyweights

Weight Unlimited

Champ: Vacant

1. **WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO** Ukraine 49-3 (44)
2. **SAMUEL PETER** Las Vegas, NV 28-1 (22)
3. **OLEG MASKAEV** Staten Island, NY 34-5 (26)
4. **RUSLAN CHAGAEV** Uzbekistan 23-0-1 (17)
5. **NICOLAY VALUEV** Russia 46-1 (34)
6. **SULTAN IBRAGIMOV** Russia 21-0-1 (17)
7. **SERGEI LIAKHOVICH** Belarus, 23-2 (14)
8. **CHRIS BYRD** Las Vegas, NV 40-3-1 (21)
9. **VLADIMIR VIRCHIS** Ukraine 23-1 (19)
10. **TONY THOMPSON** Washington, D.C. 30-1 (18)

Jr. Middleweights

Weight Limit: 154 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **CORY SPINKS** St. Louis, MO 36-4 (11)
2. **ROMAN KARMAZIN** Russia 35-2-1 (22)
3. **OSCAR DE LA HOYA** Los Angeles, CA 38-5 (30)
4. **KASSIM OUMA** W. Palm Beach, FL 25-3-1 (15)
5. **SERGEI DZINZIRUK** Germany 34-0 (22)
6. **VERNON FORREST** Atlanta, GA 38-2 (28)
7. **JOACHIM ALCINE** Canada 29-0 (18)
8. **TRAVIS SIMMS** Norwalk, CT 25-1 (19)
9. **IKE QUARTEY** Ghana 37-4-1 (31)
10. **VERNO PHILLIPS** Aurora, CO 41-10-1 (21)

Featherweights

Weight Limit: 126 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **CHRIS JOHN** Indonesia 39-0-1 (20)
2. **INJIN CHI** South Korea 31-3-1 (18)
3. **ROBERT GUERRERO** Gilroy, CA 20-2-1 (13)
4. **HIROYUKI ENOKI** Japan 26-0-1 (19)
5. **JORGE SOLIS** Mexico 32-1-2 (23)
6. **NAOKI MATSUDA** Japan 27-7-3 (10)
7. **MARTIN HONORIO** Mexico 24-3-1 (12)
8. **STEVEN LUEVANO** La Puente, CA 33-1 (15)
9. **JORGE LINARES** Venezuela 24-0 (15)
10. **NICKY COOK** England 27-1(15)

Jr. Featherweights

Weight Limit: 122 pounds

Champ: RAFAEL MARQUEZ Mexico 37-3 (33)

1. **CELESTINO CABALLERO** Panama 26-2 (18)
2. **ISRAEL VAZQUEZ** Mexico 41-4 (31)
3. **SOMSAK SITHCHATCHAWAL** Thailand 52-2-1 (42)
4. **DANIEL PONCE DE LEON** Mexico 31-1 (28)
5. **STEVE MOLITOR** Canada 24-0 (10)
6. **REY BAUTISTA** Philippines 23-0 (18)
7. **SERGIO MANUEL MEDINA** Argentina 28-1 (16)
8. **TAKALANI NDLOVU** South Africa 27-4 (17)
9. **POONSAWAT KRATINGAENGGYM** Thailand 29-1 (19)
10. **BERNARD DUNNE** Ireland 24-0 (14)

Bantamweights

Weight Limit: 118 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **HOZUMI HASEGAWA** Japan 22-2 (7)
2. **VEERAPOL SAHAPROM** Thailand 57-3-2 (41)
3. **WLADIMIR SIDORENKO** Ukraine 20-0-2 (7)
4. **SILENCE MABUZA** South Africa 20-2 (16)
5. **JHONNY GONZALEZ** Mexico 34-5 (29)
6. **RICARDO CORDOBA** Panama 30-1-2 (19)
7. **LUIS PEREZ** Nicaragua 25-0 (16)
8. **SIMONE MALUDROTTU** Italy 25-1 (10)
9. **GENARO GARCIA** Mexico 35-6 (20)
10. **ANSELMO MORENO** Panama 20-1-1 (7)

Cruiserweights
Weight Limit: 200 pounds

Champ: JEAN-MARC MORMECK
France 33-3 (22)

1. **O'NEIL BELL**
Atlanta, GA 26-2-1 (24)
2. **STEVE CUNNINGHAM**
Philadelphia, PA 20-1 (10)
3. **KRZYSZTOF WLODARCZYK**
Poland 37-2 (27)
4. **DAVID HAYE**
England 19-1 (18)
5. **ENZO MACCARINELLI**
Wales 27-1 (20)
6. **FIRAT ARSLAN**
Germany 27-3-1 (18)
7. **MARCO HUCK**
Germany 19-0 (13)
8. **VADIM TOKAREV**
Russia 23-1-1 (16)
9. **DARNELL WILSON**
Tacoma Park, MD 22-5-3 (19)
10. **JOHNATHON BANKS**
Detroit, MI 17-0 (13)

Light Heavyweights
Weight Limit: 175 pounds

Champ: BERNARD HOPKINS
Philadelphia, PA 48-4-1 (32)

1. **ZSOLT ERDEI**
Hungary 27-0 (17)
2. **ANTONIO TARVER**
Orlando, FL 25-4 (18)
3. **CLINTON WOODS**
England 40-3-1 (24)
4. **GLEN JOHNSON**
Miami, FL 45-11-2 (30)
5. **CHAD DAWSON**
New Haven, CT 25-0 (16)
6. **PAUL BRIGGS**
Australia 26-3 (18)
7. **JULIO GONZALEZ**
Huntington Beach, CA 41-3 (25)
8. **HUGO GARAY**
Argentina 28-2 (15)
9. **ADRIAN DIACONU**
Canada 24-0 (15)
10. **STIPE DREWS**
Croatia 33-1 (13)

Super Middleweights
Weight Limit: 168 pounds

Champ: JOE CALZAGHE
Wales 43-0 (32)

1. **MIKKEL KESSLER**
Denmark 39-0 (29)
2. **ANTHONY MUNDINE**
Australia 29-3 (22)
3. **JEFF LACY**
St. Petersburg, FL 22-1 (17)
4. **LUCIAN BUTE**
Canada 20-0 (16)
5. **MARKUS BEYER**
Germany 34-3-1 (13)
6. **LIBRADO ANDRADE**
Mexico 25-1 (19)
7. **CARL FROCH**
England 21-0 (17)
8. **ALLAN GREEN**
Tulsa, OK 24-1 (17)
9. **DENIS INKIN**
Germany 31-0 (24)
10. **SAKIO BIKA**
Australia 22-3-2 (14)

Middleweights
Weight Limit: 160 pounds

Champ: JERMAIN TAYLOR
Little Rock, AR 27-0-1 (17)

1. **WINKY WRIGHT**
St. Petersburg, FL 51-4-1 (25)
2. **ARTHUR ABRAHAM**
Germany 23-0 (18)
3. **KELLY PAVLIK**
Youngstown, OH 31-0 (28)
4. **EDISON MIRANDA**
Colombia 28-2 (24)
5. **FELIX STURM**
Germany 28-2 (12)
6. **JAVIER CASTILLEJO**
Spain 62-7 (41)
7. **SEBASTIAN SYLVESTER**
Germany 26-2 (12)
8. **AMIN ASIKAINEN**
Finland 20-1 (14)
9. **SAM SOLIMAN**
Australia 33-9 (13)
10. **SERGIO MORA**
Los Angeles, CA 19-0 (4)

Welterweights
Weight Limit: 147 pounds

Champ: FLOYD MAYWEATHER
Grand Rapids, MI 38-0 (24)

1. **MIGUEL COTTO**
Puerto Rico 30-0 (25)
2. **PAUL WILLIAMS**
Augusta, GA 33-0 (24)
3. **SHANE MOSLEY**
Pomona, CA 44-4 (37)
4. **ANTONIO MARGARITO**
Mexico 34-5 (24)
5. **CARLOS BALDOMIR**
Argentina 43-10-6 (13)
6. **ZAB JUDAH**
Brooklyn, NY 34-5 (25)
7. **KERMIT CINTRON**
Reading, PA 28-1 (26)
8. **LUIS COLLAZO**
Queens, NY 27-3 (13)
9. **JOSHUA CLOTTEY**
Bronx, NY 31-2 (19)
10. **OKTAY URKAL**
Germany 38-4 (12)

Jr. Welterweights
Weight Limit: 140 pounds

Champ: RICKY HATTON
England 43-0 (31)

1. **JUNIOR WITTER**
England 35-1-2 (20)
2. **VIVIAN HARRIS**
Brooklyn, NY 28-2-1 (18)
3. **PAUL MALIGNAGGI**
Brooklyn, NY 23-1 (5)
4. **GAVIN REES**
Wales 27-0 (13)
5. **SOULEYMANE M'BAYE**
France 35-2-1 (20)
6. **JOSE LUIS CASTILLO**
Mexico 55-8-1 (47)
7. **LOVEMORE NDOU**
Australia 45-9-1 (30)
8. **JUAN LAZCANO**
El Paso, TX 37-4-1 (27)
9. **DEMETRIUS HOPKINS**
Philadelphia, PA 27-0-1 (11)
10. **KENDALL HOLT**
Paterson, NJ 22-1 (12)

Lightweights
Weight Limit: 135 pounds

Champ: JOEL CASAMAYOR
Miami, FL 34-3-1 (21)

1. **JUAN DIAZ**
Houston, TX 32-0 (16)
2. **JULIO DIAZ**
Coachella, CA 34-3 (25)
3. **DAVID DIAZ**
Chicago, IL 32-1-1 (17)
4. **NATE CAMPBELL**
Jacksonville, FL 31-5-1 (25)
5. **MICHAEL KATSIDIS**
Australia 23-0 (20)
6. **ALMAZBEK RAIYMKULOV**
Las Vegas, NV 25-1-1 (14)
7. **ZAHIR RAHEEM**
Las Vegas, NV 28-2 (16)
8. **JOSE SANTA CRUZ**
Mexico 24-2 (13)
9. **YURI ROMANOV**
Belarus 19-2 (13)
10. **ANTHONY PETERSON**
Washington, DC 23-0 (17)

Jr. Lightweights
Weight Limit: 130 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **MANNY PACQUIAO**
Philippines 44-3-2 (35)
2. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ**
Mexico 47-3-1 (35)
3. **MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA**
Mexico 63-5 (42)
4. **JOAN GUZMAN**
Dominican Republic 27-0 (17)
5. **ERIK MORALES**
Mexico 48-5 (34)
6. **EDWIN VALERO**
Venezuela 22-0 (22)
7. **JORGE BARRIOS**
Argentina 47-3-1 (34)
8. **HUMBERTO SOTO**
Mexico 42-5-2 (26)
9. **VICENTE MOSQUERA**
Panama 24-2-1 (12)
10. **ALEX ARTHUR**
Scotland 25-1 (19)

Jr. Bantamweights
Weight Limit: 115 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **MARTIN CASTILLO**
Mexico 31-2 (17)
2. **ALEXANDER MUNOZ**
Venezuela 30-2 (27)
3. **NOBUO NASHIRO**
Japan 9-1 (5)
4. **CRISTIAN MIJARES**
Mexico 32-3-2 (13)
5. **FERNANDO MONTIEL**
Mexico 34-2-1 (25)
6. **JORGE ARCE**
Mexico 46-4-1 (35)
7. **KATSUSHIGE KAWASHIMA**
Japan 31-6 (21)
8. **JOSE NAVARRO**
Los Angeles, CA 26-2 (12)
9. **PRAMUANSAK POSUWAN**
Thailand 37-1-1 (21)
10. **Z GORRES**
Philippines 26-2-1 (14)

Flyweights
Weight Limit: 112 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **NONITO DONAIRE**
San Leandro, CA 18-1 (11)
2. **DAISUKE NAITO**
Japan 31-2-2 (19)
3. **PONGSAKLEK WONJONGKAM**
Thailand 65-3 (34)
4. **TAKEFUMI SAKATA**
Japan 31-4-1 (15)
5. **OMAR NARVAEZ**
Argentina 24-0-2 (15)
6. **VIC DARCHINYAN**
Australia 28-1(22)
7. **ROBERTO VASQUEZ**
Panama 24-2 (17)
8. **BRAHIM ASLOUM**
France 21-2 (8)
9. **LUIS MALDONADO**
Mexico 36-1-1 (28)
10. **JOSE LOPEZ**
Puerto Rico 35-7-2 (29)

Jr. Flyweights
Weight Limit: 108 pounds

Champ: HUGO CAZARES
Mexico 25-3-1 (19)

1. **ULISES SOLIS**
Mexico 24-1-2 (18)
2. **GIOVANNI SEGURA**
Bell Gardens, CA 18-0-1 (14)
3. **OMAR NINO**
Mexico 24-2-1 (10)
4. **EDGAR SOSA**
Mexico 27-5 (14)
5. **DANIEL REYES**
Colombia 38-5-1 (30)
6. **NELSON DIEPPA**
Puerto Rico 24-4-2 (13)
7. **BRIAN VILORIA**
Waipahu, HI 19-2 (12)
8. **OMAR SALADO**
Mexico 16-0-2 (8)
9. **JOSE AGUIRRE**
Mexico 34-6-1 (20)
10. **MUNETSUGU KAYO**
Japan 15-2 (8)

Strawweights
Weight Limit: 105 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **IVAN CALDERON**
Puerto Rico 28-0 (6)
2. **YUTAKA NIIDA**
Japan 21-1-3 (8)
3. **FLORANTE CONDES**
Philippines 22-3-1 (20)
4. **EAGLE KYOWA**
Japan 18-1 (6)
5. **MUHAMMAD RACHMAN**
Indonesia 61-6-5 (31)
6. **KATSUNARI TAKAYAMA**
Japan 18-3 (7)
7. **RODEL MAYOL**
Philippines 23-1 (18)
8. **ERIBERTO GEJON**
Philippines 23-1-1 (13)
9. **PORNSAWAN KRATINGDAENGGYM**
Thailand 19-0 (14)
10. **OLEYDONG SITHSAMERCHAI**
Thailand 23-0 (8)

By Jeff Ryan

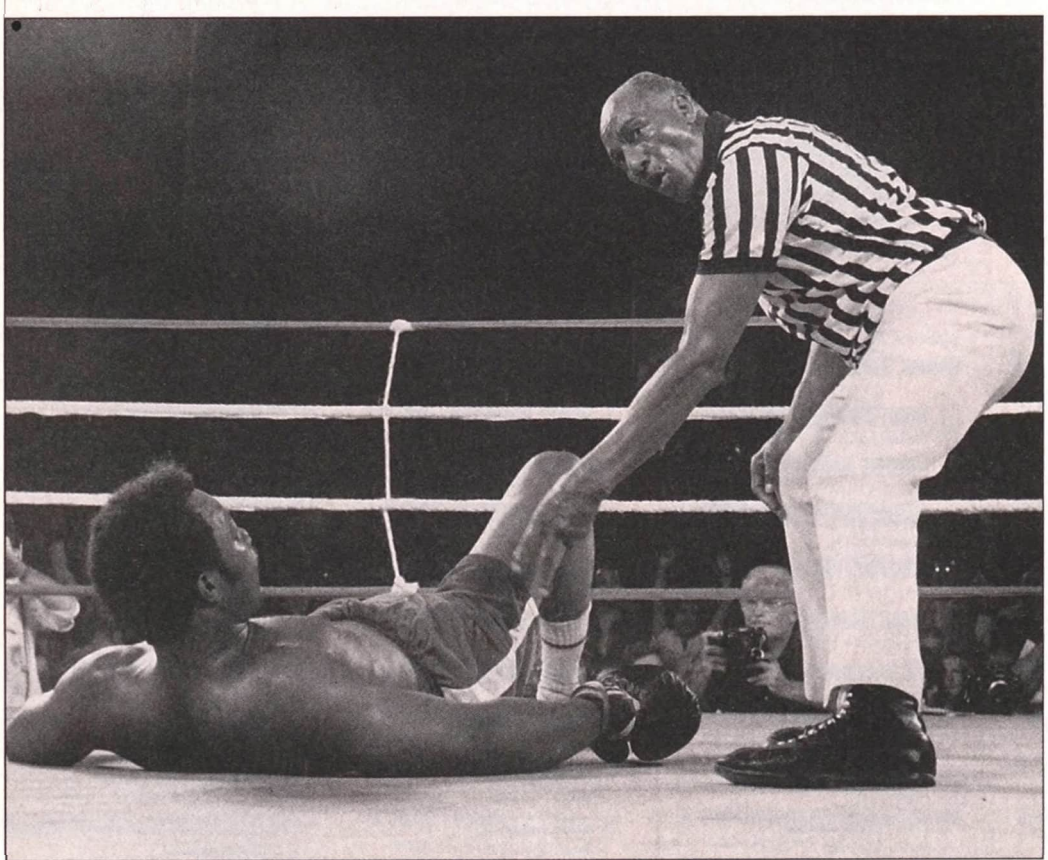
Bull And Crossbones

The vanquished making excuses for his defeat has long been as much a part of boxing as the victor jumping up on the ropes to celebrate and then riding around the ring on the shoulders of a cornerman. Almost all excuses are some variation of: a) having taken the fight on short notice, b) having been secretly injured during training, or c) having been the victim of an unfair referee, incompetent judges, or a cheating opponent. The loser usually explains his sub-par showing by saying, "I'm not making excuses ..." before going right ahead and making excuses.

Occasionally, a beaten fighter comes up with a real pip, one that varies from the script so much that you either believe the guy or want to fit him for an Everlast straitjacket. Remember Vinny Paz blaming his one-sided thumping by Roy Jones in 1995 on coffee? That's right. Paz claimed he had a caffeine crash after downing too much cappuccino before the bout. (Never mind that on that night, Paz was simply the opposite of Maxwell House. He was bad 'til the last time he was dropped.)

Any day now, we expect Paz to take his excuse one step further and theorize that the coffee was actually spiked that night. Then he can join an ever-growing list of fighters who are now blaming defeats on poisoning. That's right, poisoning. Or, as Archie Bunker used to say on *All In The Family,* "perzinning." It seems that the fight game, unbeknownst to the rest of us, has more behind-the-scenes intrigue than a paperback spy novel. Hollywood must already be scooping up the rights to these mysteries.

In his new book, George Foreman rekindles his charge that he was poisoned before his loss to Muhammad Ali in Zaire in 1974. Wladimir Klitschko thinks his 2004 kayo at the hands of Lamon Brewster is the result of being poisoned. And now Antonio Tarver has gone public with his suspicions over why he felt so mysteriously sluggish in his loss to Bernard Hopkins last year.



Foreman has new excuse for old loss

"My sister thought maybe I could have been poisoned," explained Tarver. "Maybe someone tampered with some food."

All this poisoning talk conjures images of enemy camp members sneaking out of their sweatsuits and into room service outfits in order to deliver tainted o.j. to Suite 23B. Of mysterious powders slipped into water bottles or mouthpieces that have been soaked in a liquid sedative. How far-reaching are the conspiracies? Could Russian President Vladimir Putin be behind some of this? *Uh,* that's just a joke, Mr. Putin. (The last thing

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

B-Hop administers his own brand of poison

I need is to be summoned to a lunch meeting with a Russian "editor" who wants to discuss my impending freelance assignment over beers and a radioactive club sandwich.).

Who's to say that poisoning in the Sweet Science is limited to the combatants? There are some days when the editors of THE RING, as evidenced by their behavior on the phone or the story ideas they've suggested to me, definitely appear to be under the influence of something. And, to tell you the truth, there have been times when, for some reason my mind wasn't focused the way it should be. You know that column I wrote, the one where I said John Ruiz would have forced Ali to quit on his stool after two rounds? Looking back, on the day I wrote that my take-out lo mein tasted a little funny. *Hmmm.*

Not that I'm making excuses or anything.

Hello, Larry: There's a saying in sports that sometimes the best trades are the ones that aren't made. Maybe HBO Sports boss Ross Greenburg realized that when he wised up, changed his mind, and decided to retain the services of analyst Larry Merchant.

As you know by now, HBO was all ready to say goodbye to Merchant, a 29-year veteran of the cable giant and the best analyst in the game, and replace him on *World Championship Boxing* with Max Kellerman. That would have been like re-sculpting Mount Rushmore to replace Teddy Roosevelt with Teddy Kennedy. Greenburg and Co. no doubt concluded that the 76-year-old Merchant wasn't hip enough for the ever-changing world of sports broadcasting, where the target demographic of males in their 20s and 30s likes mike men who are loud and controversial just for the sake of being loud and controversial. Guys like Kellerman.

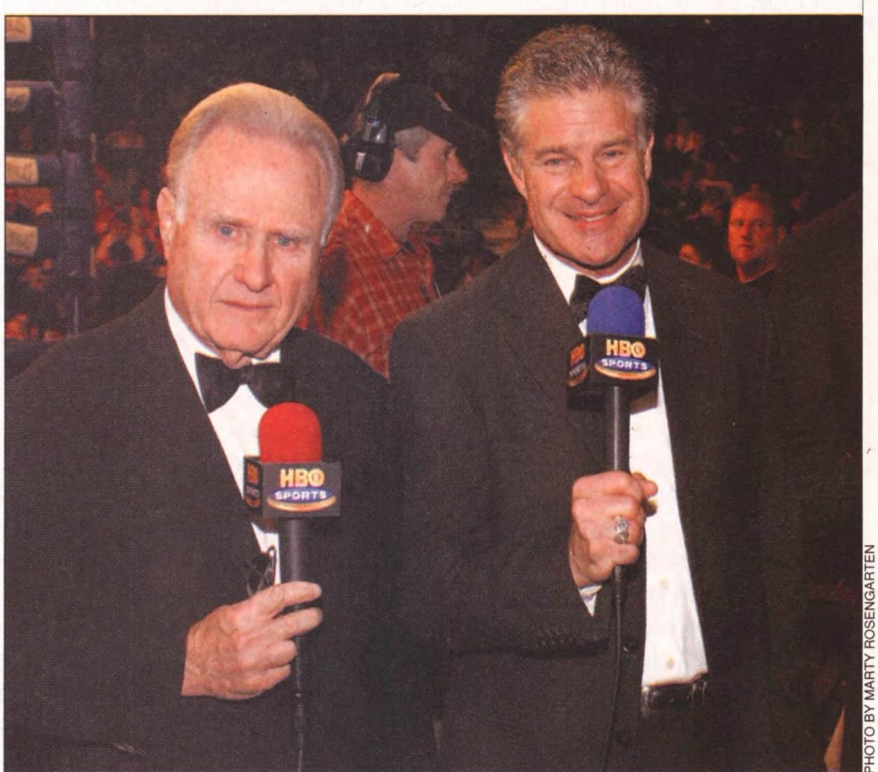


PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Larry and Lamps: Still together, but on a part-time basis

Personal Perceptions:

The last word on everything from a guy who did the drilling to a guy who does the grilling:

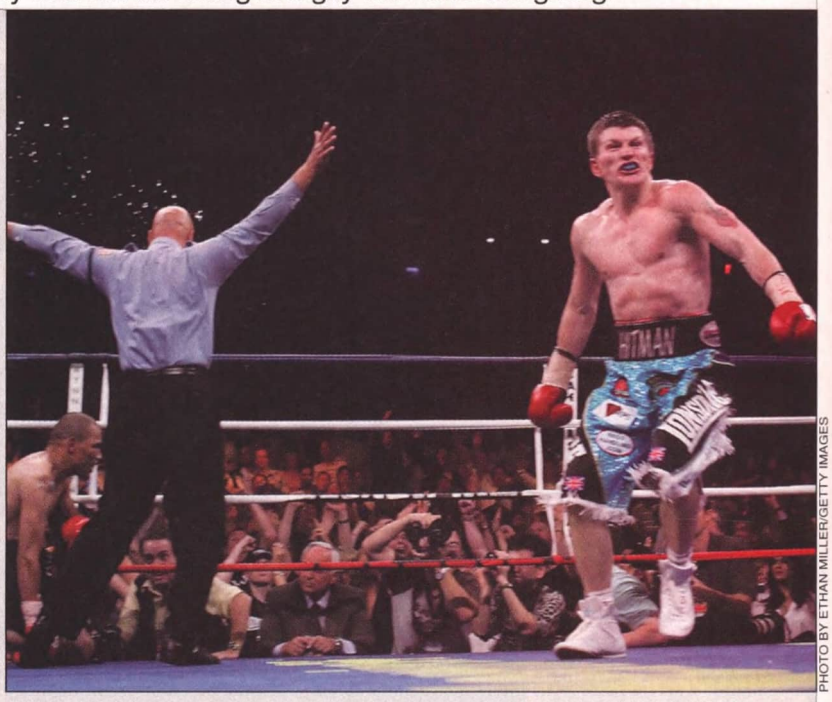


PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Hatton's timely reminder

•Never mind that Jose Luis Castillo appeared to be shot. Hatton badly needed a convincing knockout like that over a name opponent to remind us why we got so excited over the "Hitman" in the first place.

•No sadness here over would-be politician Manny Pacquiao losing his bid for a congressional seat in his native Philippines. "Pac Man" doesn't need any more distractions.

•Why do so many media types who want to point out that Oscar De La Hoya "can't win the big one" always use his defeat to Felix Trinidad as an example? For years, weren't many of those same guys complaining that he deserved the decision against Tito? Now, when it helps the point they want to make, they conveniently change their minds.

•ESPN Classic still has to be classified as a godsend for the sports fanatic, but it sure isn't what it used to be. Our friends at the network should give me a call if they need any suggestions for future boxing programming. After seeing a classic car auction, poker, and the old American Gladiators show featured recently, it's clear that the powers-that-be over there are getting mighty desperate to fill air time.

•Christy Martin is still competing at age 39, and despite her spouse's objections, which only goes to prove that female fighters can be just as stubborn and clueless as the guys. Anything you can't do, I can't do better?

•It may sound a bit farfetched, but think about it: Jermain Taylor's wins over Hopkins, which sent "The Executioner" north to the light heavyweight division, may have prevented us from seeing the dream matchup of them all: Hopkins vs. Floyd Mayweather.

•When it comes to evaluating achievements, the bar has apparently been lowered so much that Butterbean is using it to practice his high jumps. A radio commercial for Tarver's June bout with Elvir Muriqi on Showtime referred to Mr. Tarver as "The Legend." What the hell does that make Joe Louis?

•Now Zab Judah and Daddy will just go away and stop bothering us, right?

•An article in the *Austin American-Statesman* called Evander Holyfield the best of the current crop of boxing "fortysomethings." Isn't that like saying someone is the cutest ugly chick in the bar?

•It only made sense that Foreman was a judge on the ABC show *American Inventor*. After all, how many times has Big George managed to reinvent himself?

Merchant wouldn't fit in on those NFL pregame or NBA halftime shows, where the idea is to yuk it up, be as irreverent as possible, and poke fun at your colleagues' haircuts. He has never brought a frat-house mentality to his broadcasts. What he has brought is the probing mind of a former newspaper reporter and a writer's ability to paint word pictures for his audience. Merchant put the color in the role of color man.

That he now has to share duties with Kellerman on *WCB* is criminal. But it's better than having no Merchant at all, which is something tennis fans are going to experience during Wimbledon next year when they tune in to find that Bud Collins, the Larry Merchant of tennis, isn't there. Collins, who like Merchant is a newspaper guy with an incredible way with words, is not having his contract renewed by NBC. Though he has covered the tournament for 35 years and is still very good at what he does, Collins has made the mistake of turning 78 years old. He should have known better.

Wonder if boobs like Greenburg and Dick Ebersol at NBC will feel the same way about septuagenarians when they reach that age.

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Malignaggi decisions Ndou and stupefies Ryan

A-Paul-Ing: Can we presume that Paulie Malignaggi does his toe-to-toe fighting on some lonely back road at 5 o'clock in the morning? That's a logical conclusion when you consider that he saves his roadwork for when he's in the ring and the bell sounds. How much does Malignaggi motor around during the course of a bout? Put it this way: If he was still an amateur, he'd probably qualify for the U.S. Olympic track team based on his performance in the boxing trials.

It's a good thing Malignaggi isn't in the military, or the command, "Forward march!" would be met by a quizzical expression and a shrug of the shoulders. Combine his type of flight-to-the-death spirit with five knockouts in 23 wins and you've got, well, a fighter who has my salivary glands in a permanent state of lockdown.

Those of us who are overly demanding enough to actually expect excitement in our fights, though, must rejoice over Malignaggi's decision win (that's redundant when we're speaking about him) over Lovemore Ndou for the IBF junior welterweight crown. On this night, Malignaggi actually registered a flash knockdown during battle, proving that even *he* can get the ball out of the infield if the planets are properly aligned and his opponent is sufficiently off-balance.

A colorful, Italian kid from Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, who competes in an entertaining division sounds like someone who should be an automatic Ryan favorite. And Malignaggi would be if he could only punch, even a little. But instead, Malignaggi stupefies me (unless that's another effect of the poison we discussed earlier) with fight after fight that's guaranteed to go the distance. There's never any sense of the unexpected. It's The Howard Davis Jr. Show all over again. No, it's actually worse. Davis at least hit the deck regularly. Malignaggi has a more reliable chin.

Sure, Malignaggi displayed great heart hanging in there against Miguel Cotto last year, but that's the least the Brooklynite could have done after all of his prefight lip-flapping. Next time, Malignaggi will actually have to beat the marquee star he's facing. Someone such as Ricky Hatton, for instance. Imagine that matchup: Malignaggi vs. a relentless mauler with power. The "Brooklyn Dodger" would be so prepared to motor that night, he'd probably bring along not just his cornermen, but a NASCAR pit crew. ■

By Ivan Goldman

Did Barrera Mistake Hatton For Fellow-Mexican?

Maybe you were asking yourself how Mexican star Marco Antonio Barrera ended up in the cheering section of Brit sensation Ricky Hatton instead of fellow Mexican Jose Luis Castillo. Three reasons.

First, if you look at Hatton in a sealed mine shaft, he can appear almost Mexican.

Second, within the small fraternity of world-class fighters, Barrera and Hatton have been pals for a while. Each, admiring the fierce nature of the other in the ring, recognizes a soul mate, and Barrera's improving dexterity in English helped cement their friendship. Earlier, Hatton had traveled to Vegas to cheer on Barrera when he lost his squeaker to Juan Manuel Marquez. At that time Barrera pledged to be there for Hatton in return.

Third, the animosity between Mexico City residents known as *chilangos* or *capitalinos* (Barrera) and other Mexicans (*provincianos*), particularly when they're northerners like Castillo. This discord, which also heats up when a *chilango* soccer team takes on *provincianos*, provided fuel to the still-fierce Barrera-Erik Morales rivalry. Had Castillo won more hearts around populous Mexico City (as his former sparring mate and fellow-*provinciano* Julio Cesar Chavez managed to do), Hatton's cheering section wouldn't have been so dominant in the Thomas and Mack Center. Barrera's public support of Hatton had to heat up the internal Mexican fire.

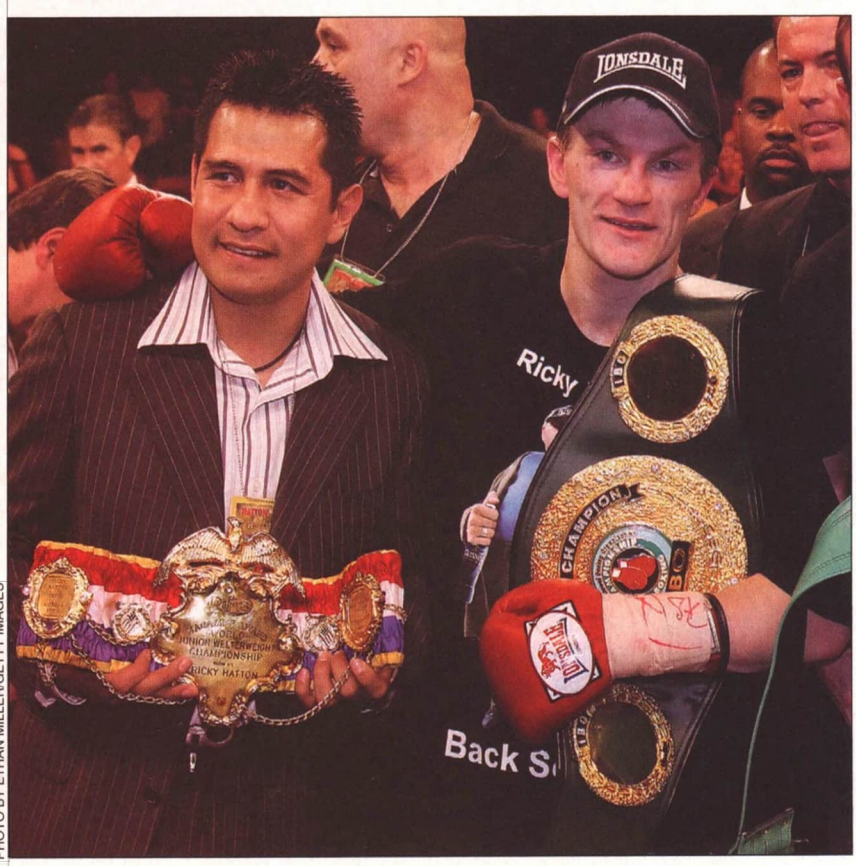


PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Hatton even allowed Mexican buddy Barrera to hold his RING belt

Hat Trick: Lots of analysts concluded Hatton prevailed because he was stronger, quicker, and younger. But more astute minds saw the sombrero he wore into the ring as the key to victory. Charmed Mexican headgear also sealed the deal for Floyd Mayweather over Oscar De La Hoya, though because he wore it backward, evidently its power was blunted, explaining why the fight went the distance. The fact that Mayweather never *tried* to kayo his opponent may have also had something to do with it, but that's just a crazy theory.

Will dueling sombreros decide the outcome if Hatton and Mayweather square off (nothing yet signed as I write this, but we can hope)? Or will the actual fight play some part? For an answer, I consulted a soothsayer who swindles tourists along L.A.'s Venice Beach. She told me to come back when I have more money, so I'll have to take this up in a later column.

Marquez, Hopkins Similarities: It will be interesting to see whether Juan Manuel Marquez (also from Mexico City) attracted additional Mexican fans after defeating the more popular Barrera. De La Hoya hoped to win over Chavez' fans after stopping him twice, but for years they repaid him with animosity instead.

We'll know more when Marquez takes on durable Argentine Jorge Barrios in Las Vegas, September 15. Even if Marquez finally attracts the bigger following he deserves, he may be another sad case of a fighter already on the wrong side of his prime when fans discover him. Marquez turns 34 three weeks before the bout.

But Ramiro Gonzalez, who works for Marquez' promoter, Golden Boy, pointed out Marquez "has no bad habits," and he expects him to stay sharp longer than most. "This kid only trains," said Gonzalez. "He's like Bernard Hopkins. He doesn't drink and he hates the smell of alcohol."

Barrios, Gonzalez said, is a party guy "who never trains properly." But for Marquez, he was already training in June. "He wants to prove something to De La Hoya" (top dog at Golden Boy Promotions). Also, Gonzalez said, Barrios, 47-3-1 (34), is a true junior lightweight, much larger than Marquez.

Chemical Assists: It was an ugly revelation, but there was still something reassuring about James Toney and Danny Batchelder testing positive for steroids in California. They got caught and punished. Compare that to baseball, where pathologically sullen, busted beyond debate Barry Bonds is still in the lineup, and who, when he's not snarling at the fans that made him rich, pretends his lifetime home-run record will mean something.

As I write this, the California commission, whose stepped-up testing program was less than three months old, has found illegal substances in at least 21 athletes. "Probably 90 percent were mixed martial artists," said executive director Armando Garcia. Toney and Batchelder were, in fact, the only boxers. In view of the fact that the commission supervises three times as many boxing shows as mixed martial arts shows, MMA, the poster child of a dumbed-down world, is starting to look more like a drug bazaar than an athletic competition.

In places like California, where MMA is licensed, promoters' grandiose claims can be measured against facts. In June, a Japanese promoter put on a show in the L.A. Coliseum and apparently assuming on-site reporters were all vision-impaired, originally claimed that 100,000 tickets were sold. Observers figured the crowd may have topped out at 25,000. The commission counted 18,340 people going through the turnstiles, 13,600 of them with free tickets. Everything was so screwed up, an undetermined number of people entered without being counted. Oh, and three participants, including EliteXC star Royce Gracie, tested positive for steroids. The whole thing smelled like a mixture of red ink and a chemical lab.

If you care at all about the fans, you don't hold two-man fighting contests in a huge stadium built for track and field, where even the best seats will stink. The L.A. Sports Arena next door seats nearly 17,000 and has a roof. In the Coliseum, everything dies except USC football. Two NFL teams in a row fled the place in horror, their gazillionaire owners outraged that the city

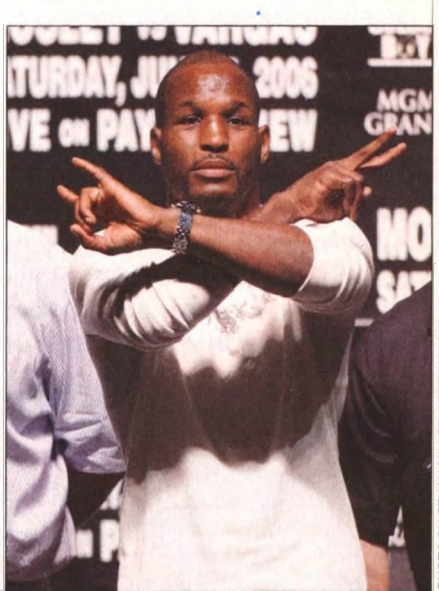


PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY MAGES

Juan Manuel Marquez (below) has more in common with "The Executioner" than you might think

PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

refused to buy them a newer stadium or at least generously sprinkle the old one with luxury boxes only an infinitesimal number of taxpayers would ever see the inside of. Let's think about that a sec.

When's the last time you heard a fight promoter demand that the local government build him a venue, fund a season tickets campaign, and guarantee him gate money? Goes on every day in the NFL, where shared TV revenue makes owning a franchise a license to print currency. How many of those owners would survive if they had to put together boxing shows?

Oscar Needs Another Mayorga: After Zab Judah and Miguel Cotto sold out the Garden (20,658 in attendance), the editor asked me if I could name anyone who'd sell out the same-sized Staples Center in L.A., and I was stumped. Local hero Oscar's lost too many lately, so even a match against Cotto might not fill every seat. And though Manny Pacquiao is a great draw, he's cleaned out most of his serious opposition.

Latinos make up the base of L.A. fans, but not even exciting Latino fighters like Rafael Marquez, Juan Diaz, Israel Vazquez, and Humberto Soto have that kind of star power. If Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. develops into a fighter like his dad, he'll sell out plenty of stadiums. We'll know more if he takes on Arturo Gatti November 10 in Atlantic City.

"I don't think there's a Mexican around with the star power to fill it up against Pacquiao," agreed retired Don Fraser, who promoted L.A. dinosaur contests. "But if they get Oscar a quick win, he and Cotto would be a big fight. They need to find him another Mayorga first. They're out there." That's thinking like a promoter.

Box Lunch: The California Boxing Hall of Fame, operated mostly by Fraser, will induct new honorees at a lunch September 22 at the Sportsmen's Lodge in Studio City. Among those being honored are De La Hoya, Shane Mosley, Fernando Vargas, Albert Davila, and Genaro Hernandez. Most, if not all, are expected to show up. Call 818-761-4887. Tickets are $50, and with only 300 seats, a sellout is pretty much guaranteed.

Burgos Report: There's some good news in the California commission report on the Vic Darchinyan-Victor Burgos contest, which was stopped in the 12th round, followed by the semiconscious Burgos leaving the ring on a gurney and undergoing immediate surgery for a swelling brain.

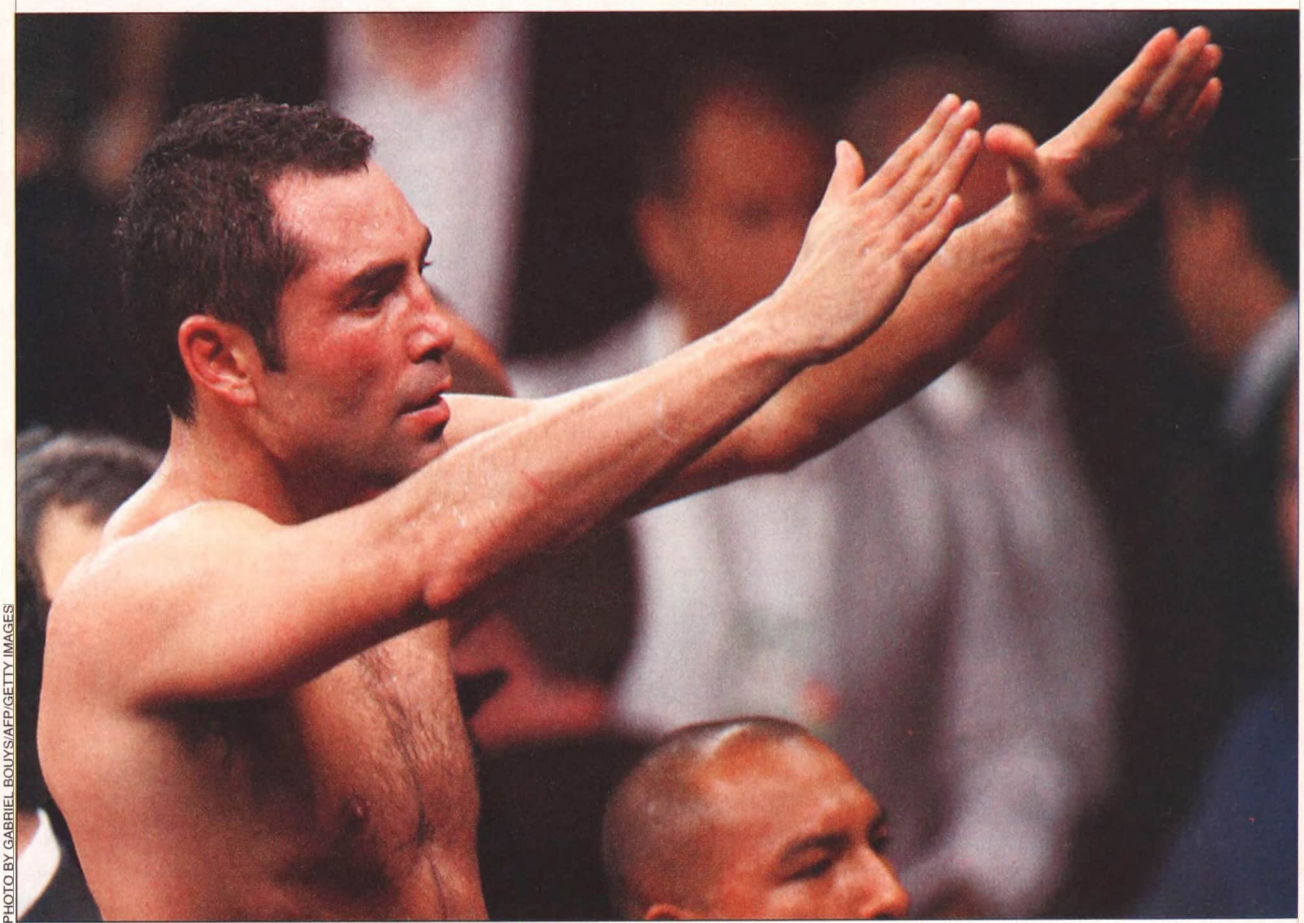
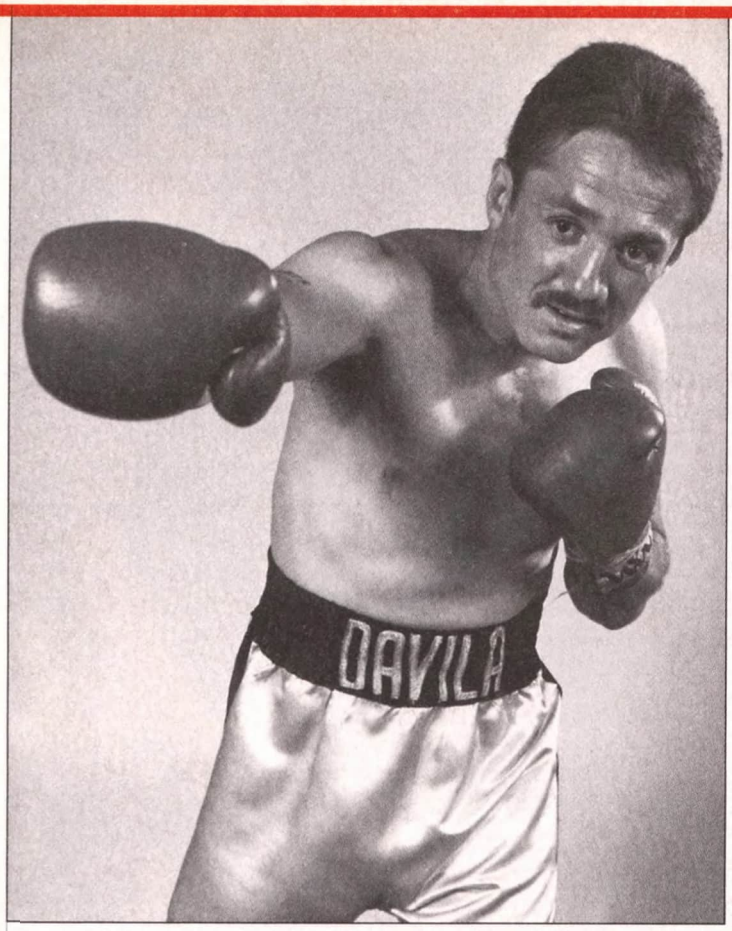


PHOTO BY GABRIEL BOUYS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Should Oscar reach out for another Mayorga?



Former WBC bantam beltholder Davila enters California Boxing Hall of Fame

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

Burgos is out of the hospital and rehabbing in Tijuana

He was "in rehabilitation in his hometown of Tijuana, Mexico. Up to now he has made a miraculous recovery, and although he will require follow-up surgery, his prognosis is improving," says the report.

The five-page statement is mostly defensive, pointing out, for example, that though Burgos "was losing the bout, he continually kept moving and throwing punches in a concerted effort to score points." It also notes that referee Jon Schorle checked Burgos in round 11 with an inspector present and Burgos "was reported to be alert and more than willing to continue."

The report doesn't ask why a physician wasn't called in to look at falling-down, overwhelmed Burgos until the fight was over or why no oxygen was administered inside the ring, or as Burgos was wheeled out. It fails to ask why no one thought to invoke Section 18733 that states, "The referee shall stop a contest when a contestant shows a marked superiority, or is apparently outclassed."

The report points out that an event's promoter need buy only $50,000 in medical insurance and Burgos "receives no money from any other source." That point is disputed by Bobby Goodman of Don King Productions, which holds Burgos' contract but was not the promoter of this show. According to Goodman, DKP was able to use its insurance as a secondary policy for an additional $100,000 and has to this point paid $3,000 for Burgos' therapy. Goodman added that the show's promoter, Gary Shaw, and the IBF had also indicated they would help out financially and that DKP planned to offer Burgos a position as a trainer.

Merchant's Staying Power: I was one of many fight writers who lamented the sorrow and pity of Larry Merchant getting booted out by HBO. Shortly before my column circulated, the network changed its mind and kept him on after all in a shared-duties arrangement with Max Kellerman, who reportedly also lobbied to keep Merchant around.

Even though I'm philosophically opposed to sticking up for TV celebrities whose workweek is about as grueling as your average house cat's, I just wasn't ready to go cold turkey on Merchant.

Wait, what's that I see flying over HBO headquarters in New York? Is it a bird, is it a plane? No, way too big for that. It's ... it's Larry's re-inflated ego. ■

Camera Clicks

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Paulie Malignaggi, you've just won the biggest fight of your life, but the real fight is just beginning, because here comes Lou "Superfly" DiBella with a sneak attack! Seriously, who knew DiBella had such ups? We haven't seen anyone get air like that in a boxing ring since Joe Frazier against George Foreman.

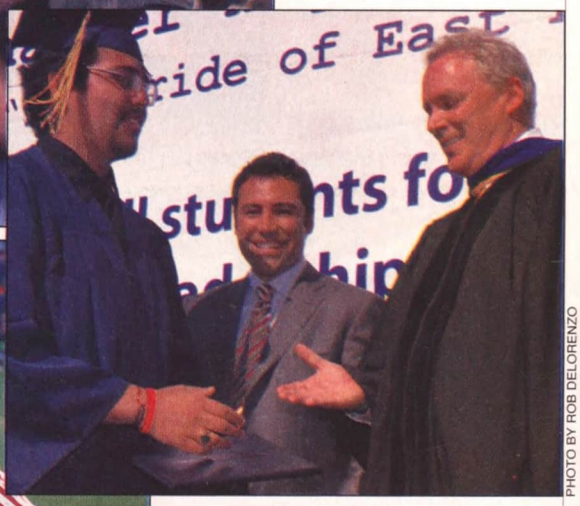


PHOTO BY ROB DELORENZO

Tiger Woods may be the one athlete outearning Oscar De La Hoya, but does Tiger have a high school named after him? We didn't think so. As Armando Alfaro, a member of the first graduating class at the Oscar De La Hoya Animo school, gets his diploma from Steve Barr, founder and CEO of Green Dot Public Schools, "The Golden Boy" is there to offer his congratulations (and his ever-present pearly whites).

PHOTO COURTESY OF 8-COUNT PRODUCTIONS

We're not sure if soccer, the one sport where you're not allowed to use your hands, is the right alternative for an athlete who makes his living with his hands, but we suppose there's no harm in receiving a free jersey. Lightweight beltholder David Diaz, taking a break from preparation for his showdown with Erik Morales, recently met up with Chicago Fire midfielder Diego Gutierrez. And apparently the prediction was that Morales goes down in the 10th.

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

It was a happy night in Las Vegas for Ricky Hatton's girlfriend, Jennifer Dooley, and the junior welterweight champ's parents, Carol and Ray Hatton, after "The Hitman" knocked out Jose Luis Castillo in the fourth round. The immediate discussion amongst Team Hatton after the fight ended: Which pub are we going to?

PHOTO BY STR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

If only all WBC belts could be stashed away in tiny prison lockers where nobody can see them. Convicted drug dealer and boxer Siriporn Taweesuk of Thailand, who won her freedom in April when she defeated Japan's Ayaka Miyano to win this green belt, empties out her locker as she prepares to leave jail after serving more than six years of a 10-year sentence. Here's hoping she fares better on the outside than Tony Ayala did.

PHOTO BY ALEXANDER HASSENSTEIN/GETTY IMAGES

Styles make fights ... and style makes "GQ Style Night," held at the Wappenhalle in Munich, Germany, in July. Undefeated Germany-based featherweight Ina Menzer was among those strutting her stuff at the event, looking a lot better in a dress and high heels than she does in a protective cup and boots.

By Andy Kent

Ronald Hearns Middleweight

Try as he might, Thomas "Hit Man" Hearns couldn't remove the boxing gene from his son Ronald, but the four-division former titleholder did make sure things were done his way. That headstrong attitude is just one of many similarities between father and son, and part of what has earned Ronald not only the respect of his trainers, but also of his opponents.

Now 28, Ronald Hearns, 14-0 (11), is still relatively green when it comes to boxing, and that is because he was forced to wait much longer than most boxers to begin his career. Even though he knew as a child that he wanted to box, his father felt differently, and for a very good reason.

"I wanted to make sure my son had an opportunity to better himself in case boxing did not work for him, so I didn't want him to start boxing until he was able to acquire an education," said the elder Hearns. "Once he acquired an education, then I had no problem with it, because I wanted him to have something to fall back on. I wanted him to be able to do more than just box; I wanted him to be able to pick and choose what he wanted to do."

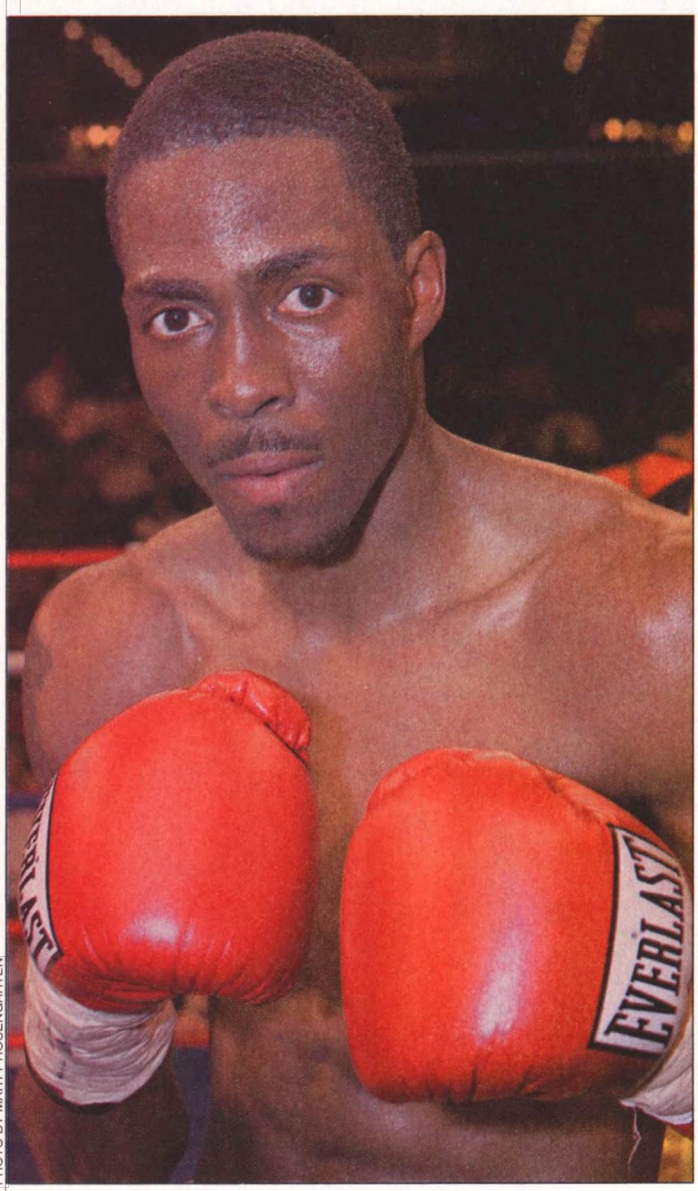


PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Pro Record

2004		
April 2	Alex Black, Detroit, MI	KO 1
May 29	Phillip Trosclair, Detroit	KO 1
July 30	Billy Johnson, Uncasville, CT	W 4
Oct. 2	Darren Foss, Las Vegas, NV	W 4
Nov. 27	Loyal Goodman, Rising Sun, IN	KO 1
2005		
June 10	Chris Payne, Detroit	KO 1
July 30	Donald Adams, Detroit	KO 1
2006		
Feb. 4	Kirk Douglas, Auburn Hills, MI	KO 2
July 1	Hector Hernandez, Manistee, MI	KO 6
Nov. 24	Jeffrey Osborne, Manistee	KO 1
Dec. 9	Robert Smallwood, N. Little Rock, AR	KO 1
2007		
Jan. 12	Daniel Neal, Auburn Hills	KO 1
Feb. 9	Chris Grays, Manistee	KO 2
May 19	Dennis Sharpe, Memphis, TN	W 8

FIGHTS	WON	LOST	DRAW	KOs
14	14	0	0	11

Being the son of a famous boxer, it's difficult not to be drawn to the gym, and Ronald was no different as a youngster. When Thomas found out Ronald was sneaking into the Kronk Gym in Detroit to watch his father and others train, the Hit Man told his people to no longer allow him in. He did the same thing when Ronald tried a different gym, basically locking him out of the sport.

Blessed with athleticism, Ronald turned his focus to basketball, earning a scholarship to American University. The 6'3" point guard earned his degree in criminal justice, fulfilling his father's dream.

But something was missing, and the events of 9/11 helped redirect Ronald's future as the offers he was getting to play basketball overseas did not appeal to him. Boxing was in his blood and he knew it was time to satisfy his urge.

"I did what [my dad] wanted me to do, went to school, finished school, and got my degree. And then the first day I got out of school I walked up to him and said, 'I'm ready.'" Ronald recalled. "He said, 'You're ready for what?' I said, 'I'm ready to go to the gym.' And he kind of just looked at me and said, 'Okay. Come on.' He took me down there, probably had me in front of the mirror for like six months just working on the jab, and then he said, 'He's got the jab down already. Let him get in there and see what he can do.'

(Continued on Page 122)

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Aug. 1982: Michael Spinks & Howard Davis Jr.: Different Destinies On The Road From Montreal. Also: Richard Sandoval, Big John Tate, Jimmy Bradock, 1956 in review.

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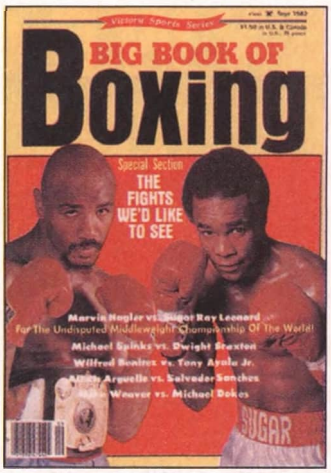

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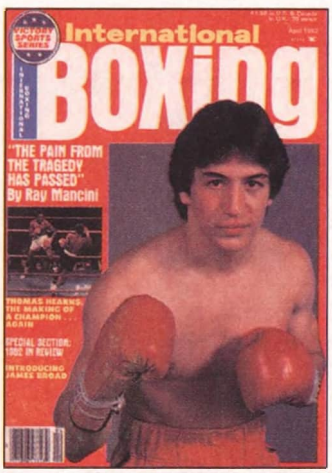

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It Starts With A War Of Words

HATTON-MAYWEATHER SUPERFIGHT BREWING

By Brian Doogan

PHOTOS BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Looking out of a large, open window over the great expanse of the Las Vegas valley, Ricky Hatton caught a tantalizing glimpse of destiny fulfilled. The living room of his suite at Caesars Palace offered standing room only for friends from Manchester, as the British boxing press probed cozily for their follow-up stories.

Newspapers back in London were already carrying headlines such as "Hatton Inspired To Stunning Win" (*The Guardian*), "Hatton's Sights On [Floyd] Mayweather After Winning Over America" (*The Times*), and "Take Fat! Hatton's Back To Best" (*The Sun*), and the congenial atmosphere on the 21st floor of the Palace

Hatton cuts loose with a victory yell as referee Joe Cortez counts out Castillo in the fourth round of their junior welterweight championship fight in Las Vegas. The kayo victory reestablished the Englishman as an exciting performer, following two mediocre outings in the United States.

Part of the contingent of more than 9,000 Hatton fans that traveled from the U.K. whoop it up at the weigh-in. Hatton's ability to attract such large crowds, has made him a potent box-office attraction on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

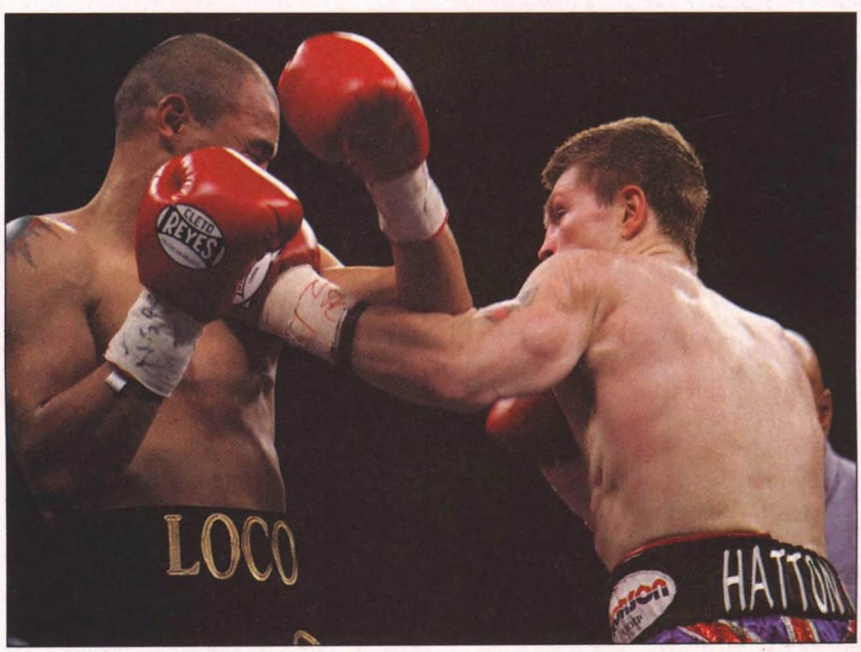
Towers influenced questions about possible battles and conquests to come. Mayweather, Miguel Cotto, even Oscar De La Hoya were all discussed happily by the Manchester "Hitman," whose legacy will be sealed in showdowns like these, one way or the other.

This was the real significance of Hatton's destruction of Jose Luis Castillo inside four rounds at the Thomas & Mack Center, and his demeanor some 16 hours later reflected his deep sense of satisfaction. At 28 years old, THE RING junior welterweight champion has earned the right to be involved in the superfights of his era. Castillo was not the formidable opponent he had once been—this had been established in January, when the 33-year-old Mexican struggled ominously against Herman Ngoudjo, a 15-fight journeyman from Cameroon—but the unequivocal manner in which Hatton brought about Castillo's demise spoke eloquently of his own right to be considered one of the most menacing and marketable practitioners in the business.

De La Hoya was among the first to convey this message, speaking to Hatton via cell phone and complimenting him on the "clever tactics" that opened up Castillo for the sickening bodypunch that ended the fight. In characteristic fashion, Hatton had crowded Castillo from the opening bell, but by creating some space during round four, he equipped himself with the necessary leverage to execute the perfect denouement.

When Castillo described it later as "the hardest punch I have ever been hit with," the skepticism that emanated from some quarters on the safe side of the ropes was rather clumsily articulated. Fighting for a paycheck in the region of $200,000 may indeed have left "El Temible" with little incentive to get up off the canvas, but the excruciating pain he felt from the blow was evident on the contorted features of his face. Even Joe Louis would probably have sympathized. When asked once to assess a fighter who did not appear to like it to the body, "The Brown Bomber" replied succinctly, "Who do?" So Hatton's declaration that it was the best body shot he has ever thrown, and he has thrown a few, is difficult to dispute.

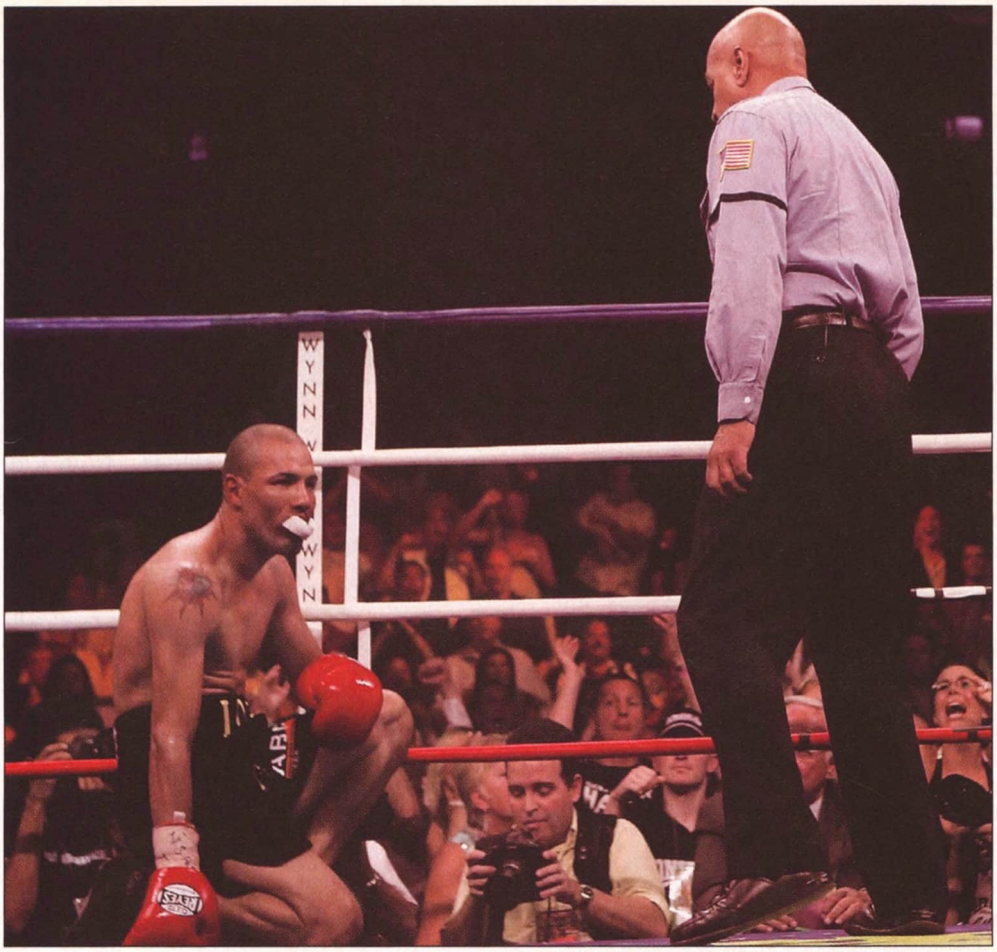
Where Hatton stands now in relation to the most notable names on his horizon is a more problematic judg-



Return to form: Looking much sharper than in recent bouts, Hatton was in charge throughout most of his brief encounter with Castillo. He got a little wild at times, but most of his punches were on-target and he was also noticeably quicker than his Mexican adversary.

ment call, and one that will have consumed his team in the weeks following the victory over Castillo. His marquee value is not in doubt, not when someone like De La Hoya is bending his ear. Whether "The Golden Boy" had designs on Hatton as a prospective opponent or acquisition to his ever-expanding stable of fighters was certain to be made clearer in the weeks that followed their conversation on June 23.

Hatton's three-bout contract with promoters Dennis Hobson and Art Pellulo expired after the Castillo contest, as did his TV deal with HBO. The deal with British broadcaster Setanta was a one-off, which left everything up for renewal. Intriguingly, Frank Warren, his former promoter, with whom Hatton parted company acrimoniously following his title-winning encounter against Tszyu, re-entered the equation when the settlement of a legal matter between Warren and Hatton's business manager and father, Ray, was announced outside the High Court in London.



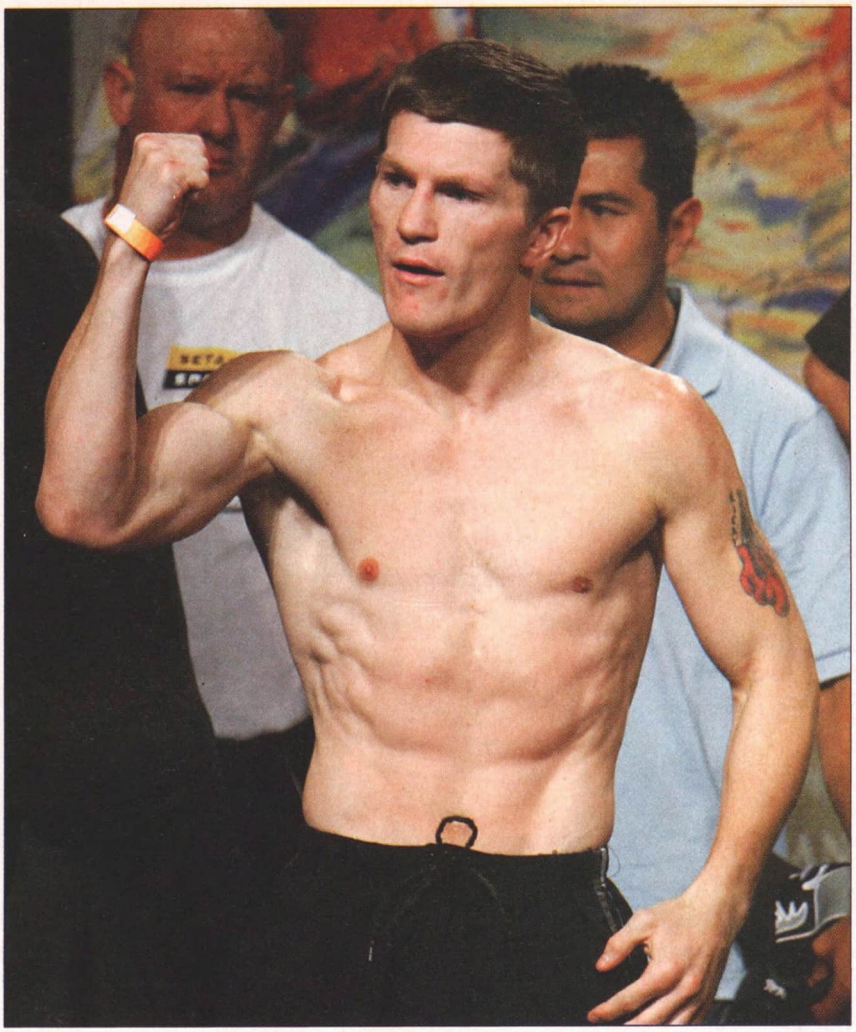
There was some debate as to whether or not Castillo could have regained his feet, but there was no doubt that the left hook to the body that put him down was legitimate. Many feel, however, that tough fights and weight-making woes, coupled with financial problems, have drained Castillo of much of his former resolve.

"Frank Warren has agreed to cease his action against Ray Hatton on the basis that both Ray Hatton and Frank Warren have agreed to enter into discussions with respect to Ricky's future fights," the statement read, underlining Hatton's status as a free agent. De La Hoya will undoubtedly have noted the Briton's appeal at the box office. More than 9,000 fans made their way over from England to support him in Las Vegas, contributing to a crowd of 13,044, which is hardly negligible. Hatton's suspicion was that De La Hoya might have been opening channels with a view to a confrontation, possibly at the rebuilt Wembley stadium in London.

"De La Hoya is a delightful, really genuine guy, but the fact that he phoned and congratulated me told me that I'm on his radar and he could be interested in a fight," Hatton suggested. "Only he can answer the question about whether he's going to fight on and who he's going to fight, but it seems very strange that he would call me if there wasn't more to it. He said to me, 'You're fantastic, you're great to watch, and you sell a load of tickets.' So he was talking like a promoter, but I don't think that, ultimately, this was his agenda."

If De La Hoya was fishing for his next foe, a line that was pedaled hard by *The Mirror* and the *Daily Mail* newspapers in Britain, some crucial questions ought to be considered first by Hatton and his team. Could he give away a 4½-inch advantage in height and an eight-inch advantage in reach to a still-competitive boxer who only lost to Floyd Mayweather, boxing's pound-for-pound king, via split points decision in May? Most pertinently, could he give away the weight, for De La Hoya would only drop to 147 pounds to make the match? Indeed, the three foremost figures on Hatton's wish list, De La Hoya, Mayweather, and Cotto, would do battle with him at welterweight, the division in which he struggled to overcome Luis Collazo in May 2006, nine months before the New Yorker was widely outpointed by Sugar Shane Mosley.

Is Hatton an authentic welterweight? He did not look like one against Collazo, a light puncher who seriously hurt him nonetheless. Hatton's trainer, Billy Graham, acknowledged that at welterweight Hatton's advantage in strength was diminished and therefore he was unable to dominate his opponent in the customary manner. But the point should be made too that Hatton had only seven weeks to transform himself into a welterweight for the bout against



No "fatton." Hatton looked ripped to the bone after weighing 140 pounds for Castillo. But could he be just as effective fighting at welterweight, where most of his attractive opponents reside?

Collazo because his original opponent, Juan Lazcano, withdrew. Given more time, Ray Hatton asserted, he would have been more dangerous at the weight.

"We learnt lessons from the Collazo fight, and these would be important if Ricky were to step up to welterweight again," the father declared. "Obviously, we discovered in trying to build him up within a very condensed period that he lost his speed and agility, so his head and foot movement were both affected, and he took more punches than he should have.

"If he had 12 weeks to build himself up to welterweight, it would be different, and the truth is that we wouldn't bring him all the way to 147 pounds. Ricky's a very strong light welterweight and he'd still be strong weighing in at, say, 144 or 145 pounds. He'd also retain his footwork and agility, which were very much in evidence against Castillo. Ricky was as strong as Collazo in the clinches, but the agility wasn't there, and this was the major disadvantage he had."

Even a diminished De La Hoya, weighed down by inactivity and the absence of hunger, may still be too big physically for Hatton. But Mayweather and Cotto are more recent inhabitants of the junior welterweight division and closer, therefore, to Hatton's natural size. The Cotto who was rocked two years ago by Ricardo Torres would surely have suffered against Hatton, but despite betraying signs of the old vulnerabilities, he is stronger at welterweight and more likely to be able to repel Hatton's assaults and instigate more telling and more sustained attacks of his own.

"My ass is twitching just thinking about a fight with Cotto because, with our styles, I don't think there is a more value-for-money fight to be made. It would be excitement and fireworks all night," Hatton insisted. "Is there a more exciting match-up in boxing?"

There is one more spiteful, certainly, for even before Castillo had fully recovered, the insults were flying between Hatton and Mayweather. The Hitman's suggestion to HBO commentator Max Kellerman in his postfight interview that "you saw more action in four rounds [tonight] than you've seen from Floyd throughout his whole career" drew the desired response from the allegedly retired "Pretty Boy."

"Ricky Hatton has talked non-stop about fighting me for two weeks," Mayweather countered. "He has disrespected me and my accomplishments in the ring, and I take that very seriously. I'm going to give him the opportunity to step up and fight the best in the world, but I don't think this punk will take the challenge. Now that Hatton has opened up his big mouth, he might start to think about what he has been asking for. Does he really want to step into the ring with the best fighter of this era and embarrass himself? Being the coward that he is, I doubt he'll get in the ring. We'll see what his excuse will be this time."

Hatton has long hankered after a Mayweather encounter and in the comfort of his suite he warmed to the theme. "I would be Floyd's worst nightmare, that's what I firmly believe," he declared. "He wants me like [he wants] a hole in the head. Technically, there is no better fighter around, even though his performances bore most people to tears. He has so much talent, but I don't sit up until four in the morning back in England to watch him, because he'd only send me to sleep. He likes to sit on the ropes and shut up shop, but I wouldn't give him that luxury.

"De La Hoya had the right tactics for the first half of their bout, up until the seventh round or so. I was thinking to myself, *Floyd, you're going to have to pull your finger out here.* Then Oscar died off in the last four or five rounds, just when I'd be getting stronger. Physically, Floyd is no bigger than me—I've been up close beside

him—and, even though he's a wonderful fighter, I really don't think the win is beyond me."

If Hatton could be as relentless and punishing as he was against Tszyu, he could engage Mayweather in an enthralling test, but speed, as opposed to size and physical aggression, is the most likely determining factor. One deficiency he displayed against Castillo, which Hatton would have to address before any encounter with Mayweather, is the wildness that infiltrated his work. For the most part he was brutally economical, hitting the Mexican straight in the face with his left jab shortly after the opening bell and, surprisingly, dominating the infighting. His hooks and uppercuts to the jaw carried far greater threat, for Castillo's poor balance left him unable to deliver punches that might have stopped Hatton in his tracks. He moved forward incessantly and his continued high volume of punches in the second round drove Castillo into a neutral corner, where the champion landed two hard rights to the body.

The left hook to the head, however, was frequently an errant shot, and Castillo enjoyed a degree of success toward the end of the third round, when he caught Hatton with a right and a left to the jaw and another short right just before the bell. For the Mexican fans and their veteran charge, it served as a false dawn.

Early in round four, Castillo was penalized a point by American referee Joe Cortez for punching low, and he lost momentum. Hatton, 43-0 (31), seized the initiative, attacking with both hands and targeting Castillo's body. Then an opening presented itself and Hatton ripped in a savage left hook that struck Castillo, 55-8-1 (47), near his liver. After spinning around in apparent agony, he went down on his right knee and remained on the canvas beyond the referee's count, which reached an end at the 2:16 mark.

"I'm sad and disappointed for the way I lost the fight," Castillo reflected. "Ricky is a good fighter and he caught me with a good shot. I just couldn't stand up. The fight was getting more interesting and I thought I was getting into it, but he caught me right, and sometimes that happens."

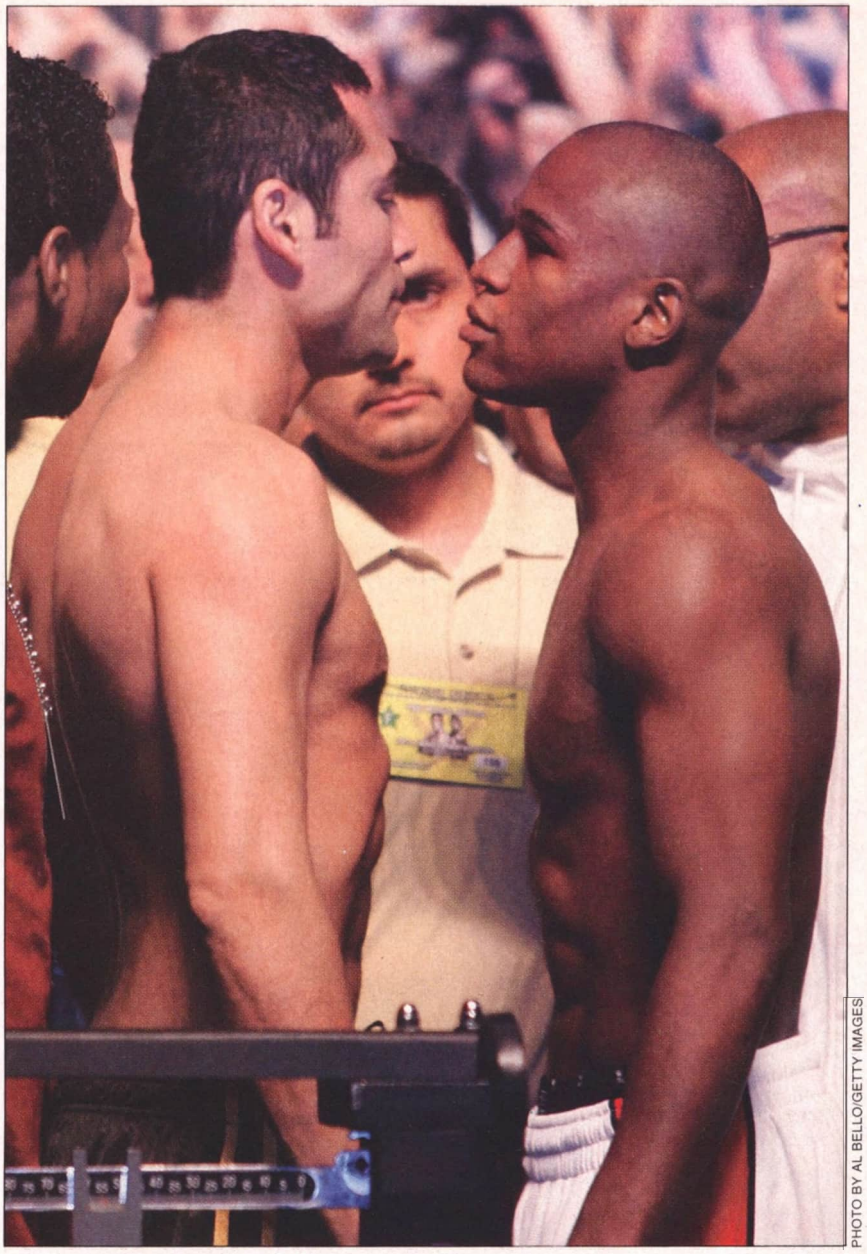


PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

De La Hoya and Mayweather go eyeball-to-eyeball at the weigh-in for their May superfight. Oscar phoned to congratulate Hatton following the Castillo victory, while "Pretty Boy" took umbrage at some of Hatton's postfight comments and claimed he was eager to make the Brit eat his words.

Castillo predicted a bad night for Hatton if he were to encounter Mayweather. "Hatton would have no chance of beating him," Castillo insisted. "I pushed Mayweather all the way twice, and I should have won the decision (in their first encounter), but he would be too fast for Hatton."

Paulie Malignaggi, the nifty New Yorker who won the IBF junior welterweight strap with a virtual shutout over Lovemore Ndou, was being touted as a possible opponent for Hatton in October or November, a scenario with which Hatton would have no problem.

"It's one of my dreams, to fight at Madison Square Garden, and this would be a logical venue," he emphasized.

As he looked out toward the Mojave Desert, however, he was dreaming of bigger fights. "The bigger the name, the better I am," he insisted. "That's how it was against Tszyu and now Castillo."

But if bigger were to mean a return to welterweight, Hatton's imperiousness may not be so easily maintained. ■

Brian Doogan, THE RING's European correspondent, was ringside in Las Vegas for Hatton-Castillo.

Bernard Hopkins' Upset Of Winky Wright:

A SIMPLE CASE OF MIND OVER MATTER

By Nigel Collins

The gigantic personality of Bernard Hopkins has become a force unto itself, as much a vehicle for his success as the miracles he performs inside the boxing ring with his 42-year-old

PHOTOS BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Once again, "The Executioner" upset the odds and proved that age is no barrier if the mind is sharp and spirit willing. Bernard Hopkins called upon all his guile and experience to shut down Winky Wright's offense and retain the light heavyweight championship via unanimous decision.

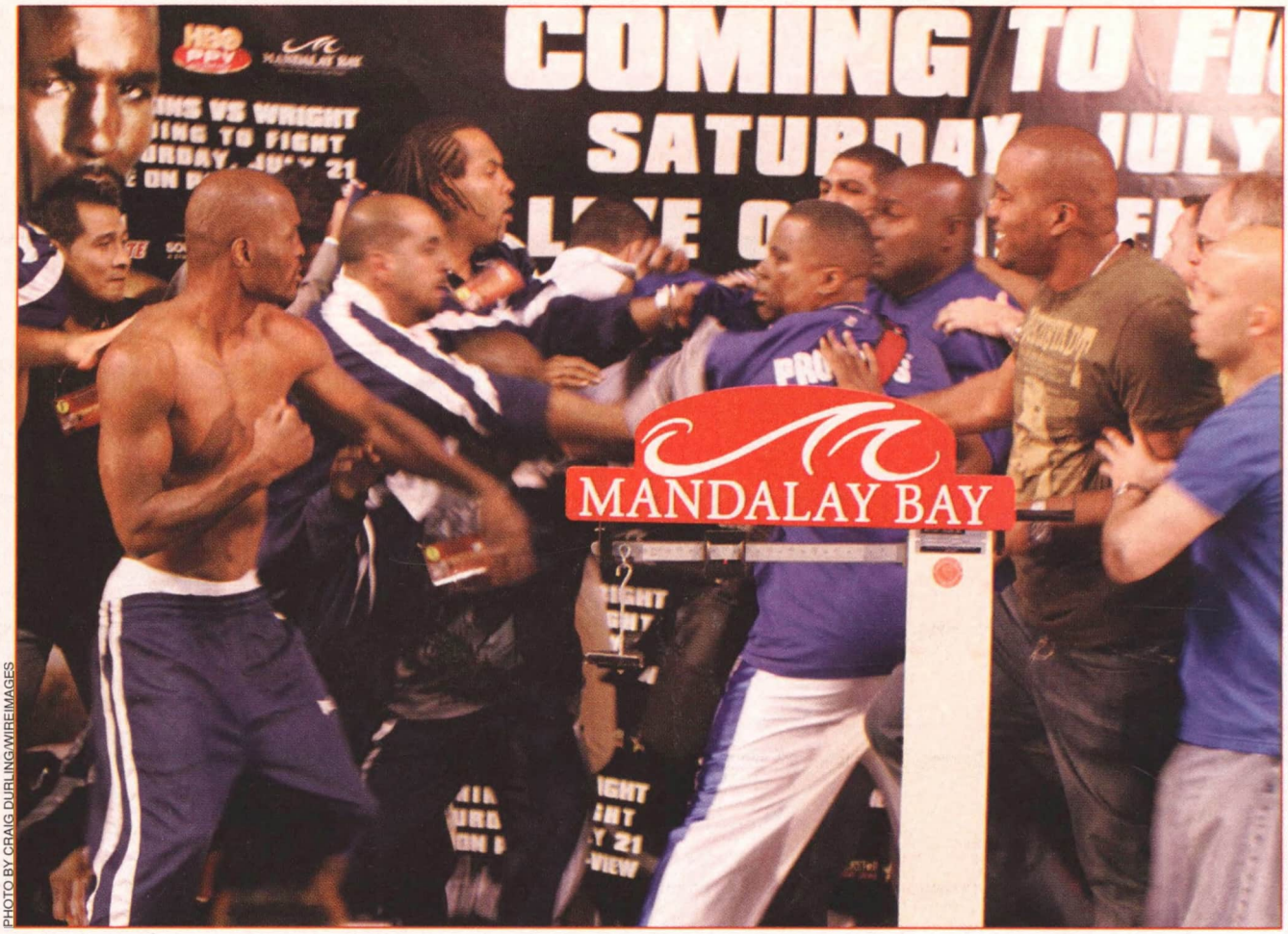


PHOTO BY CRAIG DURLING/WIREIMAGES

The fireworks began at the weigh-in when Hopkins smacked Wright in the forehead, sparking a brief melee. While his actions could cost Hopkins a hefty fine, the unexpected gamesmanship might have prompted Wright to become the aggressor once the official fight got underway.

body. In fact, at this point in his career, Hopkins' persona is more powerful than his punch and his steel-trap mind is the most deadly weapon in his arsenal.

Beating Winky Wright was the latest triumph in the legacy Hopkins has been weaving ever since he walked out of the penitentiary in 1988, a legacy that continues to grow with every unlikely victory. But make no mistake: None of this happened by accident. Hopkins has recycled his past and reinvented himself. And by far the most impressive part on the finished product is his intellect, which was manifested in all its cunning brilliance against Wright.

The big difference between Hopkins and most ex-cons is that instead of wearing his prison record around his neck like a millstone, he found a way to spin it into a gold championship belt. The lessons he learned in a prison yard have been adapted to the prize ring, especially the mind games.

On paper, Hopkins won by sweeping the final four rounds on all three official scorecards, resulting in his first successful defense of the world light heavyweight championship. But the foundation for victory was laid a long time before he ducked between the ropes at the Mandalay Bay Events Center on the evening of July 21.

Although much of Hopkins' remarkable success is due to his monk-like devotion to fitness, clean living and endless toil can only hold Father Time at bay for a limited period. There comes a time when muscle and bone alone are no longer enough. When that happens, fighters have to call on other resources, and this is where Hopkins' true genius has emerged.

The upset victory over 2-1 betting favorite Wright was not won during the 36 minutes he shared with Winky in the ring. It was constructed piece-by-piece, layer-by-layer, a matrix more elaborate than any spider web—but just as deadly for those who become entangled.

The road to victory started when Hopkins agreed to fight Wright. It was a consolation prize, prompted by his inability to obtain a match with WBC heavyweight titleholder Oleg Maskaev. Fighters of Hopkins' age, stature, and bank account need a challenge to get the juices flowing, and while a crack at a heavyweight belt was certainly a formidable task for a man who had spent most of his career at 160 pounds, in many ways Wright presented an even thornier problem.

Unbeaten since his controversial decision loss to Fernando Vargas in 1999, Wright's subsequent victories over Shane Mosley and Felix Trinidad, plus his engaging draw with middleweight champion Jermain Taylor, had nudged the savvy southpaw ahead of Hopkins on most pound-for-pound lists.

Wright has the uncanny ability to make even his best opponents look bad

by shutting down their offense and peppering them to death with arguably the best southpaw jab in boxing. If Hopkins was going solve the Winky conundrum, he was going to have to figure out a way to take Wright's confounding style and turn it against him. Hopkins convinced himself that this was a challenge worthy of his attention. Well, that and a $3-million guarantee.

Still, it wasn't going to be easy. Hopkins knew that this was a fight that could only be won with painstaking planning, highly focused discipline, and, most importantly, his Freud-like insight into the mind of his opponent.

The psychological warfare began during the buildup, with Hopkins promising to punish Wright and suggesting that Winky "might not be right after the fight." Hopkins claimed that he'd sensed that Wright was the sort of fighter who "didn't want to get hurt" and "who will not push himself to that level" when total commitment to the moment is required in order to prevail.

On the other hand, Hopkins also knew that Wright is not easily ruffled, so when Winky laughed off most of his prefight trash talk, "The Executioner" ratcheted up the intimidation factor by smacking Wright in the forehead at the weigh-in. This instigated a brief but spirited melee during which one of Hopkins' trainers, Freddie Roach, fell off the stage and hurt his ribs.

Many thought it was a ploy to boost attendance and pay-per-view sales. But although Hopkins, in an attempt to avoid being fined 10 percent of his purse, said, "It was nothing but promotion, baby. Nobody was hurt," there was undoubtedly an underlying motive that went deeper than dollars.

In a battle of counterpunchers, the winner is usually the man who can force the other fighter to lead, and more than anything else, Hopkins wanted Wright to take the fight to him. Those who had made Wright the betting favorite figured he'd set a quick pace and outwork the old man, and Winky apparently bought into the theory.

But Hopkins wasn't taking any chances. He knew he needed all the pieces to come together for his fight plan to work, and a little insurance wouldn't hurt. If punking Wright at the weigh-in goaded Winky into taking the risky course he was already leaning toward, it was worth a try.

But gamesmanship was only part of the winning fight plan. Even if Hopkins could ruffle Wright's composure, finding a way to negate his southpaw jab would still be the key to unlocking the puzzle. It was something Hopkins and his eclectic team of trainers—Roach, Naazim Richardson, and John David Jackson—had worked on throughout training camp.

"I respect the art of war," said Hopkins at the postfight press conference. "When you go to war, you try to take away the other side's weapons. Y'all said that Winky Wright has the best defense in boxing, that Winky Wright has the best jab in boxing. So it was easy for me to know what to take away from him. I took those things away and he

PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

One of the most surprising aspects of the fight was that Hopkins found a way to make Wright miss far more than he ever had before. In a battle between highly skilled defensive specialists, B-Hop proved superior by outthinking his challenger.

was helpless. He has no other tools to work with."

Hopkins accomplished his mission by using his ageless legs to create distance and angles that caused Wright to miss as he's never missed before. Not only couldn't the challenger connect with his usual consistency, Hopkins' economical footwork positioned him where he needed to be in order to land the lead right, long the weapon of choice against left-handers of all stripes.

Hopkins, 170, also made conspicuous use of the clinch, tying up Wright, also 170, whenever he got close enough to inflict damage. To a degree, Hopkins was aided in this by referee Robert Byrd, who issued numerous warnings for various infractions throughout the bout but never penalized Hopkins.

This made for a mauling, often untidy encounter, which, while hardly aesthetically appealing, was nonetheless the path to victory for the Philadelphian. Not only did Hopkins' holding negate Wright's inside game, all the tugging and pushing with the physically stronger and naturally larger man gradually ate away at Winky's strength and endurance.

At times Hopkins looked more like Standley Ketchel or Harry Greb than Marvelous Marvin Hagler, who sat ringside to watch the man to whom he has been compared. It was far from thrilling stuff to witness, but it was a brilliant role reversal: Wright has made a career out of making the other guy look bad, and Hopkins was the first to figure out how to do it to Wright.

"Bernard Hopkins is a real student of the game," noted former Hopkins victim and current business partner Oscar De La Hoya. "He knows how to neutralize whatever game plan you have. He studied Winky inside out and was in control all the way."

That may have been a slight exaggeration, as Wright was only marginally behind after eight rounds and could have conceivably won if he had rallied during the final four. But by then the younger man (by seven years) looked weary and not a little discouraged. When the moment of truth arrived, the old dog still had plenty of bite, while the relative pup was almost toothless.

The foundation for Hopkins' strong finish, however, was built in the early going. After frustrating Wright for most of the opening round with his move-and-grab technique, Hopkins drove home a counter right. The punch jarred Wright and made him stumble backward, much to the delight of the crowd of 8,626 at the Mandalay Bay Event Center.

There was a pivotal moment in the third when they banged heads and Wright emerged with a cut over this left eye. Wright, seemingly unsure of himself, turned away and took a knee. Byrd called time out and asked the doctor to have a look. And although the fight was allowed to continue, Wright was clearly bothered and remained so throughout the rest of the bout. Of course, the fact that Hopkins chopped away at the tender spot with right

A Big Gust For The Winds Of Change

The nefarious alphabet organizations took a direct hit when Bernard Hopkins and Winky Wright fought exclusively for The Ring belt. It must have been torture for WBC President Jose Sulaiman to sit ringside and hear Michael Buffer announce that the fight was for "The Ring magazine light heavyweight championship." And one can't help wonder if Sulaiman also had to avert his eyes whenever The Ring logos Hopkins wore on his trunks crossed his line of vision.

None of this would have been possible without the unqualified support of Hopkins and Golden Boy Promotions, two entities that refuse to be hogtied by the dictatorial demand of the leach-like sanctioning bodies.

But it was not just a triumph for The Ring's Championship Policy, it was also a victory for the Sweet Science, an indication that the winds of change are gathering strength. If more fighters and promoters follow Hopkins' and Golden Boy's example, that wind will soon become the perfect storm to blow the alphabet organizations out of boxing.

—N.C.

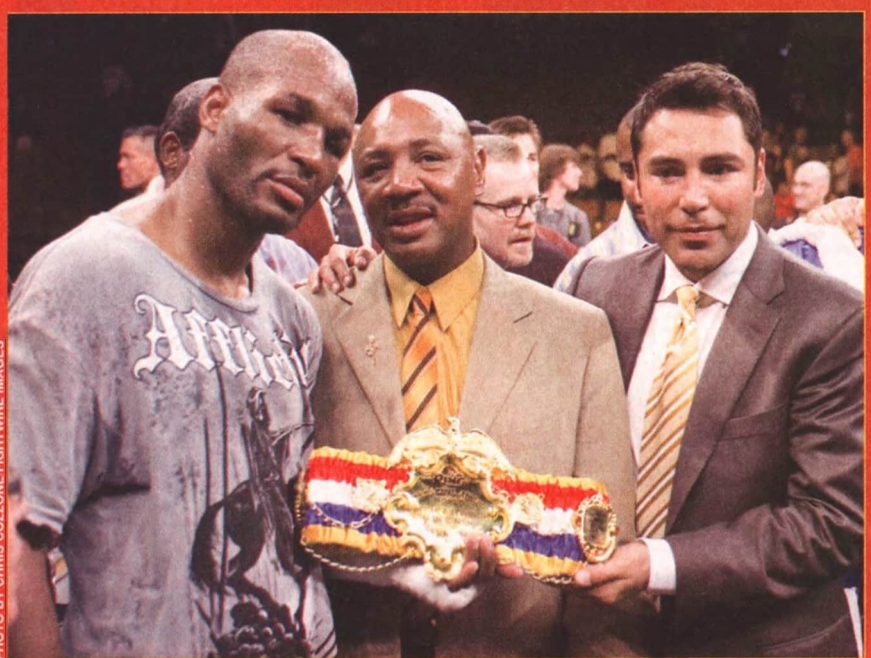


PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Promoter De La Hoya joins Hopkins and Marvelous Marvin Hagler (holding B-Hop's Ring belt) after the fight

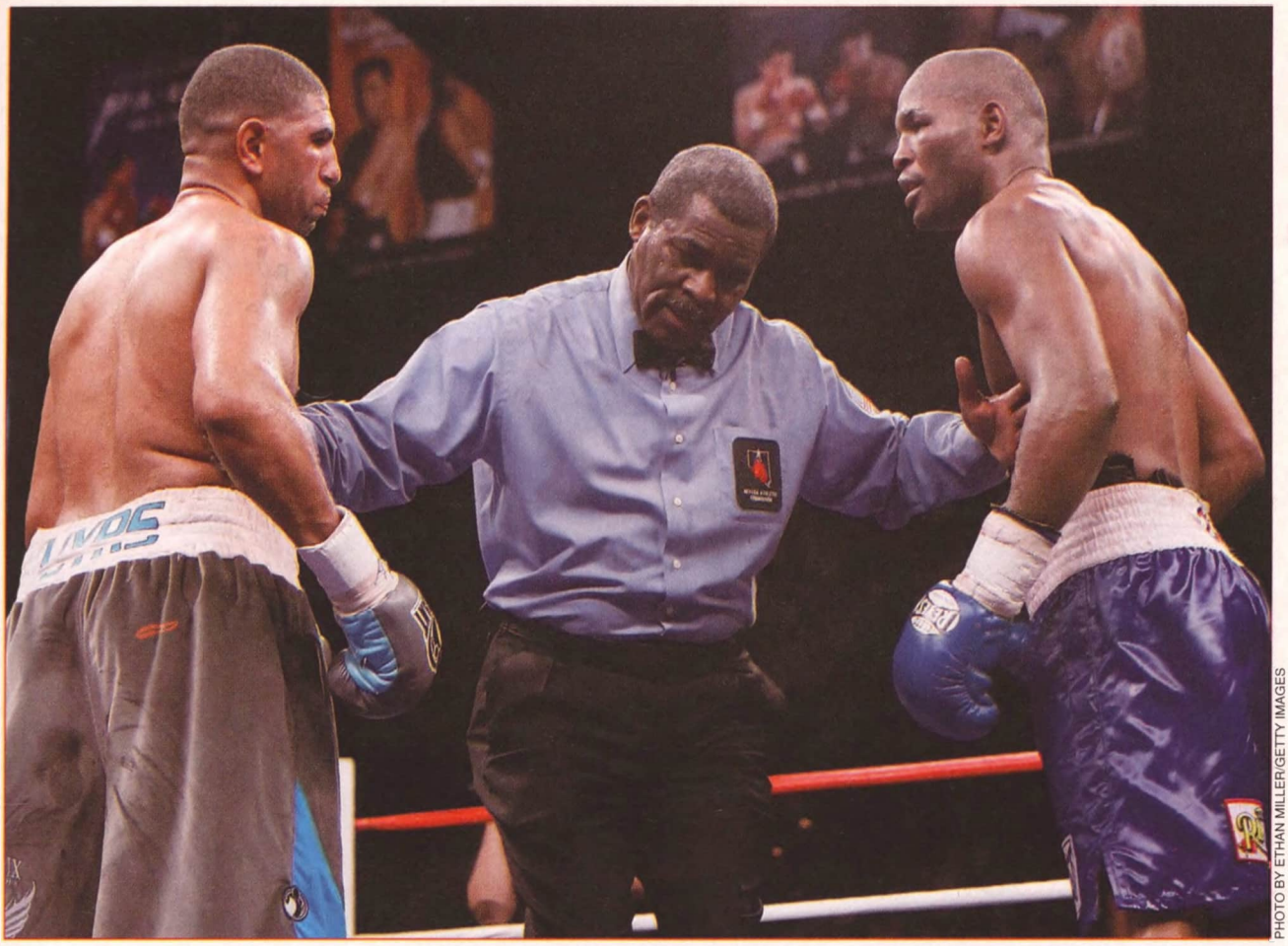


PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

A large part of Hopkins' fight plan involved frustrating Wright with frequent clinches, a strategy that kept referee Robert Byrd busy separating the pair throughout the fight. But despite repeated warnings, Byrd never penalized the defending champion.

hands whenever the opportunity presented itself also had something to do with that.

Byrd ruled the butt accidental, and in a postfight interview with HBO's Max Kellerman, Wright agreed. But only Hopkins knows for sure. "This is a hurting business," sneered the former street fighter. "I don't mind getting cut for this kind of money."

Spurred on by his wound, Wright had one of his best rounds in the fourth. He finally found the target with a few jabs, delivered a nice one-two, and traded tit-for-tat in a rare exchange. But Hopkins reasserted his authority in the fifth, landing a good right and a couple of quick flurries on the inside, where he began to augment clinching with bursts of short punches.

There were boos early in the seventh, as the holding became overbearing, but despite the slower pace, Wright looked drained at the bell. Even so, he summoned up the energy to increase the tempo in the eighth, the last round he won on the official cards.

By the 10th, it was time for another role reversal, and Hopkins began to take the fight to Wright for the first time. It wasn't an all-out cavalry charge by any means. There were still plenty of clinches, but the "B-Hop" chants were getting louder and the right hands kept bouncing off of Wright's head with something resembling regularity.

Those who knew what they were watching could tell that the deal was done. Professor Hopkins had been correct: When a desperate attack was the only way to win, Wright, 51-4-1 (25), never went for it, never took the ultimate risk.

Of, course, neither did Hopkins. But he didn't have to.

There was a minority that disagreed with the unanimous scores in Hopkins' favor, and maybe Dave Moretti and Glen Trowbridge were a tad generous with twin tallies of 117-111. But THE RING had the same 116-112 score as Glen Hamada, and whining was minimal.

It will all end for Hopkins one day in the not too distance future. He knows it. We know it. His opponents know it. But until that day comes, he's going to push it to the max, squeezing every little bit he can out of his extraordinary boxing career.

The victory over Wright has only emboldened him further. When asked whom he would like to fight next, Hopkins, 48-4-1 (32), instantly invoked the name of super middleweight champion Joe Calzaghe.

"I think a Calzaghe fight in Yankee Stadium would be a great event," said Hopkins.

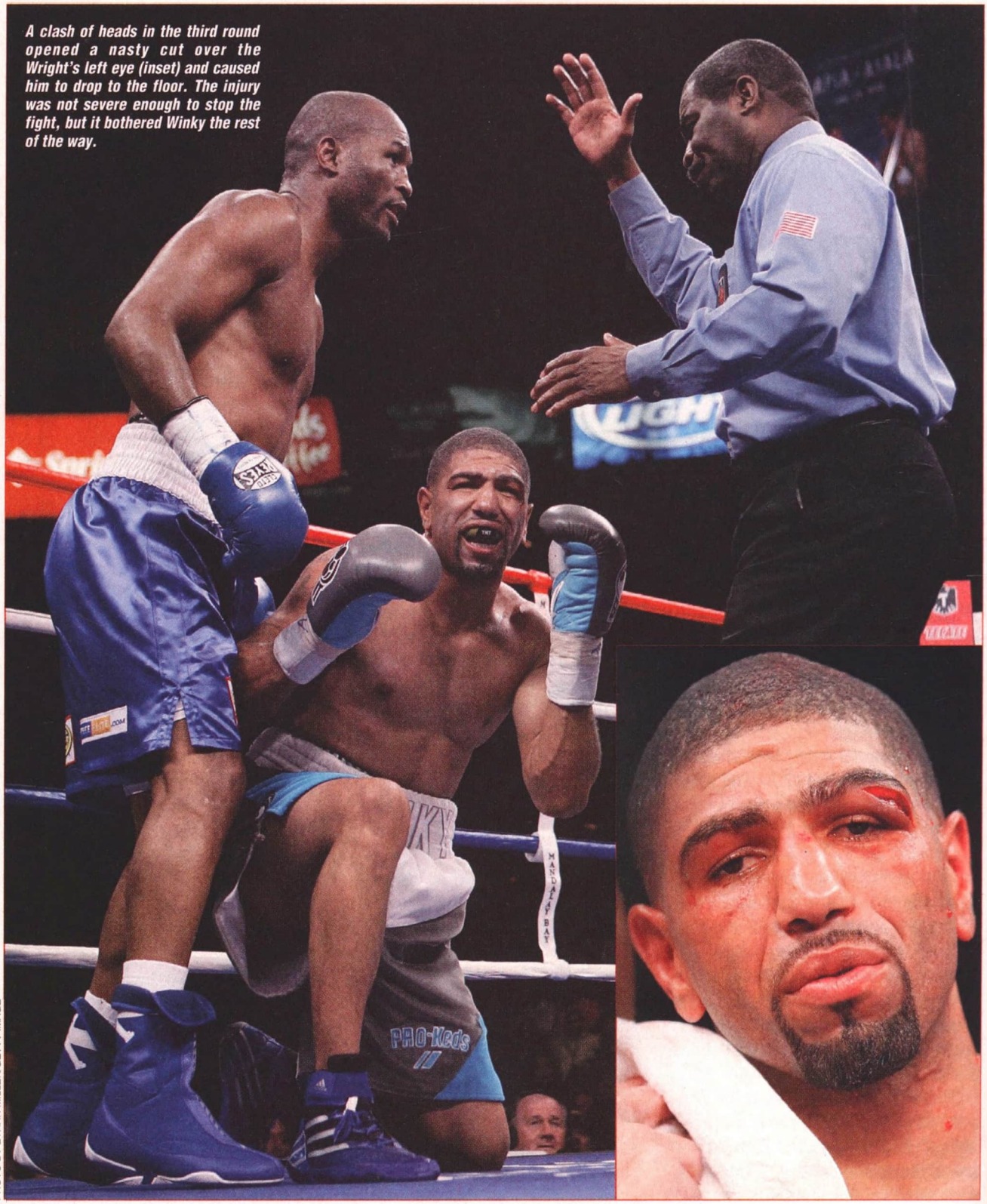
First, of course, Calzaghe has to get past number-one contender Mikkel Kessler in November, but if the Welshman is good enough to stay unbeaten against the marauding Dane, he might very well be the man to end Hopkins' incredible run.

And if it's not Calzaghe, eventually it will be somebody else. Fighters like Hopkins don't retire until somebody beats the crap out of them, and that has yet to happen to him, which undoubtedly contributes to his feeling of omnipotence.

"If I wanted to, and I don't say this to be bragging or boasting, I could fight another four years," said Hopkins.

Who knows? Perhaps he could. He's proven his critics wrong so many times it's difficult to argue. Then again, like so many others before him, he could fall victim to his own conceit. In the end Hopkins will probably outsmart himself.

But until then, he remains something of a wonder, a fighter not only far greater than the sum of his parts, but also the captain of his fate, a fate whose finish line keeps receding into the future. ■



A clash of heads in the third round opened a nasty cut over the Wright's left eye (inset) and caused him to drop to the floor. The injury was not severe enough to stop the fight, but it bothered Winky the rest of the way.

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGE

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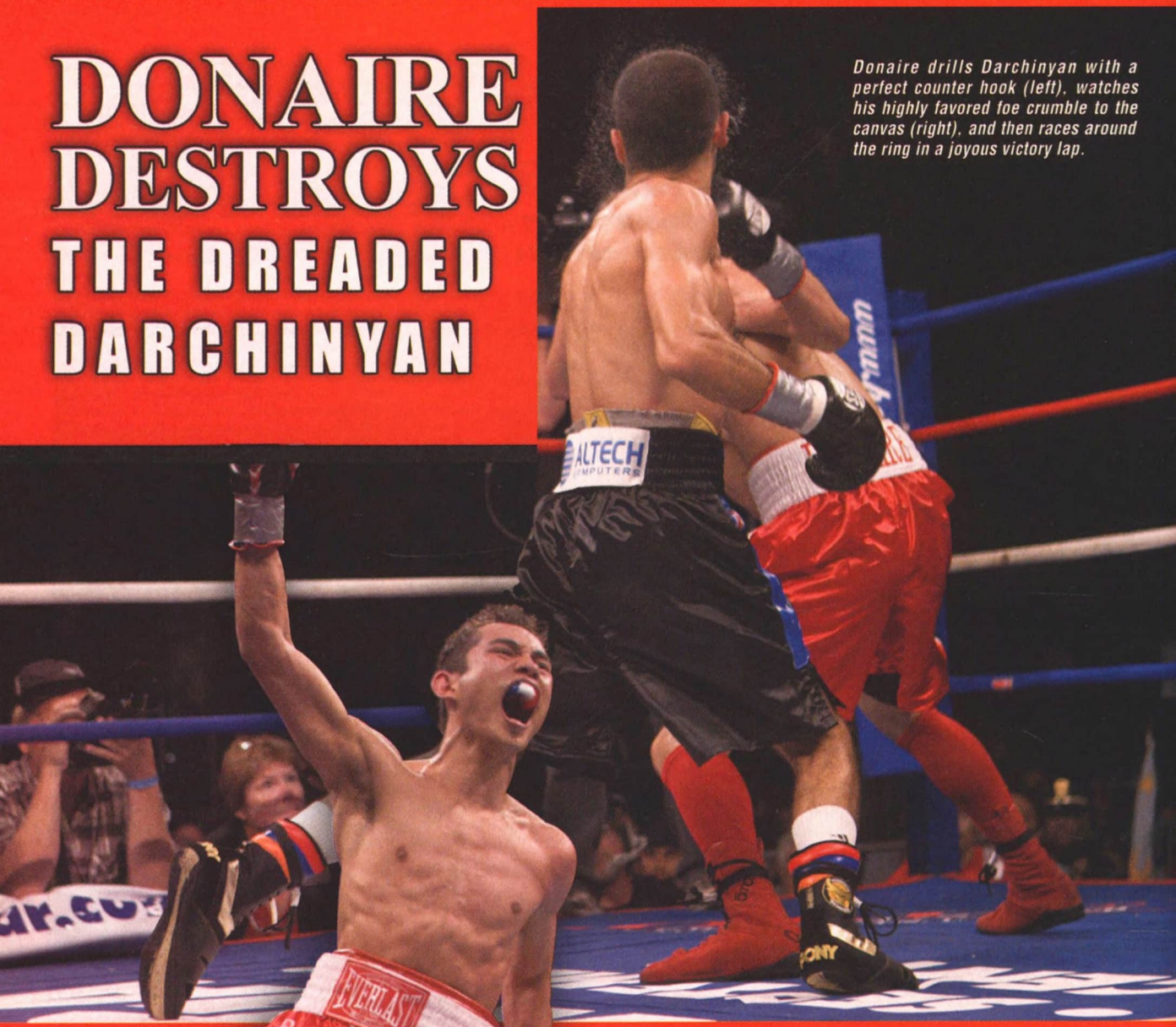

Donaire drills Darchinyan with a perfect counter hook (left), watches his highly favored foe crumble to the canvas (right), and then races around the ring in a joyous victory lap.

Revenge And Fame ... With One Left Hook

PHOTOS BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

By Joe Santoliquito

Nonito Donaire could always find refuge behind a back not much larger than his own. He was the nuisance child every teacher dreads, the na-na-na-na kid, with his hands waving from his ears, pointing and mocking, just daring anyone in the schoolyard to challenge him. But the taunts and the gestures always came from a safe haven—behind his older brother, Glenn. There, Nonito could be brave. There, no one could infiltrate his protective cocoon. There, Nonito was king of his small world.

Time has a way of changing things. Today, Nonito Donaire finds himself the ruler of a much larger world. He's out there doing things he thought unimaginable some time ago, like punishing the very man who once punished Glenn, ending Vic Darchinyan's reign as IBF beltholder with a fifth-round knockout, at the Harbor Yard Arena in Bridgeport, Connecticut, on July 7. Donaire, 18-1 (11), did it decisively, splattering

PHOTO BY JOEL NINO/AFP/GETTY MAGES

Philippines idol Manny Pacquiao, pictured in Manila following his second win over Erik Morales, has been the darling of the Filipino media for years. Prior to the kayo of Darchinyan, Donaire hadn't received much support from his homeland, but that is beginning to change.

the overwhelming favorite with a wrecking-ball left hook that sent the Australia-based southpaw sprawling onto the canvas.

Today, of course, Nonito is more than capable of fighting his own fights. The Filipino-American is a rising star on the periphery of the Philippine boxing domain ruled by superstar Manny Pacquiao. The Philippines has been a hotbed of boxing the last six years, all due to the success of Pacquiao. Naturally, every fighter that follows "Pac-Man's" footsteps would like a portion of the fanatical support Pacquiao receives in the Philippines. Donaire is no different.

Brian Viloria, another Filipino-American, tried building a fan base on the coattails of Pacquiao's success. After a promising start, he has faltered, going 0-2, with 1 no-contest over his last three fights. Now comes Donaire, a bright, personable 24-year-old who exudes charisma and speaks three different languages, Visayan, Tagalog, and English. He would love a fan base in the Philippines, the country he called home before moving to the United States when he was 10, to live with his father, Nonito Sr., and mother, Imelda.

But prior to his knockout of Darchinyan on Showtime, Donaire was virtually a nonentity in his homeland. Two weeks before his fight with Darchinyan, the Philippine press had showed up to Freddie Roach's Wild Card Boxing Gym, in Hollywood, California, where Donaire was training with his father/trainer, Nonito Sr. There was a swirl of media in the gym that day, since Bernard Hopkins was also there preparing for his light heavyweight world championship defense against Winky Wright.

A Filipino camera crew was on hand to do a story on lightweight Czar Amonsot, "the next great Filipino champion," one Filipino media member exclaimed. They happened to mention this within earshot of Nonito Sr., who naturally pointed to his son and said, "That's the next great Filipino champion."

The gathered Philippine press was clearly unimpressed. They ignored

"The Filipino Flash" and left. The snub didn't go unnoticed by Donaire.

It's the reason why Donaire said, after vanquishing Darchinyan, "I won't forget that day at the Wild Card. They just brushed me off like I was nothing. It's not just that, there were a lot of Filipinos who were saying I was a sacrificial lamb and that I was going to get knocked out by Darchinyan. It's like I had my own people going against me. I hope this victory proves something to the people in the Philippines.

"I've always been proud of my Filipino heritage. I always wore the Filipino flag on my trunks in the amateurs. America gave me all this opportunity; coming to America is the reason why I am where I am right now. But I'm Filipino. I want to make my people proud. They just never fully accepted me. And I don't know why."

There are similarities between Donaire and Pac-Man. They were both 18-1 after their first 19 pro fights. They both lived in General Santos City and attended the same grade school. They both survived hard times in their youth.

That, however, is about where the connections end. If anything, Donaire is the anti-Pacquiao. You won't find him playing pool or cards into the wee hours of the morning like Pacquiao has been known to do. Instead, Donaire would probably be fixated on a computer screen playing video games.

Donaire and Pacquiao sparred in 2001, as Pac-Man was readying to face Lehlo Ledwaba for the IBF junior featherweight title. The two had lunch and dinner together. Pacquiao even offered the budding pro some sage advice on how to fight aggressive southpaws. Though Pacquiao knew Donaire, not many Filipino boxing fans did prior to the Darchinyan fight. Pacquiao, on the other hand, was well-known even before he became an international sensation, due to the fact that many of his early fights were shown on a local Philippine television show called *Blow By Blow*.

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/SHOWTIME

Southpaw Darchinyan measures Nonito's older brother, Glenn, with his right hand, and you just know one of the Australian's vicious lefts is to follow. Darchinyan broke Glenn's jaw en route to a technical win in July 2006, but found Nonito a much tougher proposition.

Donaire's career development was somewhat retarded due to promotional entanglements and a lack of TV exposure. Donaire needed six years to win a major belt. Pac-Man did it in half that time, winning his first belt in December 1998, when he took the WBC flyweight title with an eighth-round stoppage of Chatchai Sasakul in '95.

Donaire still wants to forge a bond with his home country and isn't embarrassed to say he'd like to be embraced the same way Pacquiao is. "I would love to have the support of the Filipino people like Pacquiao received when he beat [Marco Antonio] Barrera or [Erik] Morales, for them to look at me the same way they look at Pacquiao," Donaire said. "I wanted to win this championship for me and my family. Even if the Filipino people don't support me, I'll always put that flag on my trunks."

Donaire already has a "Little Philippines" right there at his fingertips, thanks to his parents, two brothers and sister, and his extended family and friends. They're like a traveling boxing troupe, going everywhere he goes. That extra-strength bond was at the base of Donaire's victory over Darchinyan, when the usually affable Filipino Flash turned into a demon.

"That was the first time in my life that I was really pissed off when I went into the ring," Donaire said. "Darchinyan made it a family affair by bringing my brother Glenn into it. The day of the fight, I usually have an appetite. This time I was so angry, I had to force myself to eat. I wanted to take him out in the first round. I wanted to stand over him and say to his face, 'With all your crap-talking, your ass is on the floor now.' I wanted to say that, but I didn't."

It's just not Donaire's way. Though he couldn't escape the vision of Glenn getting pounded by Darchinyan, when "The Raging Bull" broke Glenn's jaw in winning a sixth-round technical decision on October 7, 2006, in Las Vegas.

In many ways, it was the ultimate role reversal. As children, it had always been Glenn running to Nonito's defense. When the Donaire brothers lived in Bohol, Philippines, with their maternal grandparents, while Nonito Sr. and Imelda were building a foun-

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

The family's honor restored, Donaire's father/trainer, Nonito Sr., embraces his son moments after the Darchinyan fight was stopped. The victory was a huge upset and the sort of performance that can catapult a fighter to overnight stardom.

dation in the United States, they had very little. The children walked in slippers because they couldn't afford shoes. Soda was considered a delicacy, served only on special occasions like funerals and birthdays. The same with meat. Old batteries were left out in the sun during the day to recharge, and used at night.

But it was the link between Glenn, now 27 years old, and Nonito Jr. that kept the four children together. And fighting tethered it.

"When I was little, I looked to Glenn as a father; he was the one who would go to different places to pick fights with other kids to see who was the better fighter," Nonito said. "Kids were scared of him. People would pick on me all of the time. I was a quiet kid; I sucked my thumb until I was 12."

When Glenn was there, it was different. Little Nonito would agitate, then seek his brother's protection, instigating even further. The other kids would stop there. "They'd stop because they knew better," said Nonito, laughing.

The previously undefeated Darchinyan wasn't going to stop. He's the type who keeps on coming. He almost killed Victor Burgos in his last outing, on March 3, in Carson, California. But facing a monster never fazed Nonito.

"Darchinyan was going to pay, and he was going to pay with the left hook," Nonito said. "Every time he threw his left, he kept opening himself up. He was slow too. I knew what he was going to throw before he threw it. I kept waiting and waiting. I almost got him in the fourth round. But when he threw the left in the fifth, I knew I would catch him with the left hook. That was it."

After the hook connected flush, Darchinyan's legs continued moving forward as the rest of his body crashed backward onto the floor. It

was the first knockdown of his career. Darchinyan stumbled onto his feet at seven, nose bloodied, but trainer Billy Hussein rushed into the ring to save his disoriented fighter as he floundered into the ropes, forcing referee Eddie Claudio to call a halt at the 1:38 mark.

According to Donaire, he hit Darchinyan, 28-1 (22), so hard The Raging Bull became a braying bull. Apparently, he never fully comprehended what had happened, and turned to Hussein as they were leaving the ring, and asked, "What hit me?" Hussein replied, "It was the left hook, Vic, the left hook."

And what a spectacular left hook it was, making the fight an instant candidate for both Knockout *and* Upset of the Year.

Donaire's victory and Daisuke Naito's subsequent upset of longtime WBC fly titleholder Ponsaklek Wonjongkam could shed some rare clarity on the 112-pound division. A box-off between Donaire and Naito, ranked number one and number two, respectively, would crown the first RING flyweight champion since the magazine launched its Championship Policy in 2002. Other lucrative bouts for Donaire could come against Japan's Koki Kameda, Argentina's Omar Narvaez, or a rematch with Darchinyan.

"This kid is a star," said Donaire's promoter, Gary Shaw. "He may stay at 112 because he has a belt, but he could move to 115. He can fight as high as 118 if the opponent and the money is right. But he may have the same problem that Darchinyan had. No one might want to fight him."

But something has happened that might make fighting The Filipino Flash an economic imperative. Suddenly, a country that once ignored him can't get enough of its latest fighting hero.

After beating Darchinyan, Donaire's face was plastered on the front page of every major Philippine newspaper. Three days later, he and his father received a call from the Philippines. Popular TV sports reporter Diane Castijello, a fixture at many of Pac-Man's fights, was on the phone. Nonito and his father just looked at each with knowing eyes, and then high-fived as Castijello said on the other end, "The Philippine people want to hear from you, Nonito Donaire, and about your amazing victory."

Not only is Donaire out from behind his brother's back, the call from Castijello indicates he's also taken his first few steps into territory that was previously the exclusive domain of Manny Pacquiao. ■

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Although he still has a baby face, Donaire has come a long way since his thumb-sucking days. He captured the IBF 112-pound belt with his win over Darchinyan and also earned the number-one spot in THE RING's flyweight rankings.

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SPECIAL SECTION:

10 RING Writers Recall "THE GREATEST FIGHT I EVER SAW"

There are certain questions that boxing writers hear all the time: Can you get me free tickets? Do you know Mike Tyson? What's the best fight you ever saw? The first two are easy to answer, but the third requires a bit more thought and an explanation.

It is with this in mind that THE RING decided to ask 10 veteran boxing journalists to each write an essay on the best fight they ever saw. It doesn't matter whether they covered it professionally, purchased a ticket, or saw it on TV as a kid. The important thing is that they convey what it was that made that particular fight so special to them. And as you will discover, there's usually more to it than just what transpires between the ropes.

Some of the fights selected were to be expected, while others came as a bit of a surprise. But regardless of whether they are writing about a glitzy Las Vegas bash or a half-forgotten brawl that took place off the beaten track, perhaps the most fascinating aspects of the essays is that they often tell us almost as much about the writers as the fights they are writing about.

The writers chosen for this assignment are, in alphabetical order: Robert Cassidy, former associate editor of THE RING; Editor-in-Chief Nigel Collins; Senior Writer William Dettloff; British author and historian Gavin Evans; Boxing Writers Association of America President Tim Graham; Philippines correspondent Ted Lerner; *Grand Rapids Press* boxing writer David Mayo; Contributing Editor Eric Raskin; and our pair of prolific Dons, Steward and Stradley.

Together, these 10 writers comprise a vast storehouse of boxing knowledge and several hundred years of ringside experience. But more importantly, they have the skill to bring these 10 classic fights to life in a new way, giving a personal perspective to a very public spectacle.

The fights are arranged in chronological order.

GEORGE FOREMAN KO 5 RON LYLE

By William Dettloff

George Foreman's thrilling, 1976 off-the-deck knockout of Ron Lyle in Las Vegas did as much for me—at 11 years old a walking, freckled anxiety attack—as it did for him and his fledgling return to the ring. It also ranks, still, 30 years later, as the best fight I've ever seen.

This was not the cuddly, bald-headed salesman younger fans know Foreman to be today. In '76, "Big George," though no longer the undefeated, invincible force of nature he was before Muhammad Ali Rope-a-Doped him in Zaire 15 months prior, was still all menace and bulging biceps, chilling stares and booming overhand rights. This was the pre-grill machine, pre-Jesus Foreman. Old school Foreman if you like. Afro Foreman. A bad dude and nothing cuddly about him. Which is precisely why, as a boy, I idolized him.

I was a shy, anxious kid who had a mysterious and unenviable talent for attracting, in great number, bullies of all shapes, sizes, and affiliations from around the middle-class New Jersey town in which my family and I lived rather unhappily, as many families do. I don't to this day know why there were so many mean-spirited, juvenile borderline sociopaths in the neighborhood, but there were, and all of them seemed to know intuitively that they terrified me. When opportunities were presented, they chased and I gave flight, always a step ahead, which, in the end, probably suited them as well as it did me. No bully likes to be challenged. Fortunately for everyone involved, nothing could be further from my mind than challenging anyone, so it worked out nice. Looking back, it's little wonder I chose Foreman, the very personification of strength and power, as my hero: I wanted to be him. Or, at the least, to be like him. Alas, I couldn't be any less like him.

Impossibly, despite my near pathological hero worship, it wasn't a great time for Foreman. After the loss to Ali, he disappeared for six months, popping up only occasionally to share this or that alibi for having lost the world heavyweight championship to a fighter who, at 32 years old, had been considered washed-up: The ropes were loose; the canvas was soft; Zack Clayton gave him a quick count; he'd been drugged.

Lyle and Foreman receive playful pokes from Joe Louis during preflight hype

Then, in April '75, came that monstrosity in Toronto, Canada. His fight against five journeymen in one afternoon, undertaken to show the people that he *did* have stamina, that there really *was* something wrong with him in Zaire, sounded better on paper than it turned out to be. It devolved into a circus and took

Las Vegas, Nevada, January 24, 1976

on the appearance and stench of a professional wrestling match, with fans taunting Foreman from ringside and Foreman, trying out his showbiz skills, embarrassing himself. I felt every taunt he took in the newspapers in the days after. And there were many.

After a couple of exhibition fights—clubbing knockouts of Jody Ballard and Eddie Brooks, and so much for going easy in exhibitions—Foreman took on Lyle, who was a considerable risk. Two fights earlier, Lyle had comported himself well in an 11th-round kayo loss to Ali, and then stopped the fearsome Earnie Shavers in six rounds. He was muscle-bound and heavy-handed, and even at 34 years old (or maybe *because* he was 34 years old), completely fearless. In a span of 11 months he fought, consecutively, Jimmy Young, Ali, Shavers, and Foreman, four of the top heavyweights of the best era ever in heavyweight boxing. He matched Foreman in size and strength and had an even scarier personal history than Big George did.

While Foreman was still waving around his little American flag at the '68 Olympic Games, Lyle was doing hard time in a Colorado penitentiary on a second-degree murder rap. Clearly, Foreman would not be able to intimidate him as he had so many others, and that concerned me: Foreman's ability to scare lesser fighters accounted for much of his success, everyone said. Maybe I had built him into something more than he was. If he couldn't scare Lyle, and as a result Lyle beat him, it would mean he'd been a fraud all along. A bully, no better than the cretins who chased me home from school every day. Then what would I do?

Writers seemed impressed that after the loss to Ali, Foreman had jettisoned Dick Sadler, Sandy Saddler, and Archie Moore, his original team. They liked their replacements: Gil Clancy, who trained Jerry Quarry and Emile Griffith, among others, and Kid Rapidez, legendary trainer of the great Jose Napoles and dozens of Latin American fighters. I was dubious; Saddler and Moore were two of the game's great knockout artists. They belonged with Foreman, and he with them, if he was one of them.

The details of the fight are well known now to any fan of heavyweight boxing in particular or of violent, wonderful mayhem in general. Lyle, as predicted, showed no fear of Foreman, stunning him in the very first round, my worst fears realized before the bout was even three minutes old. So obvious was Foreman's desperate unraveling after getting banged by Lyle's thudding overhand right that Howard Cosell was moved to remark to special broadcast partner and one-time Foreman victim Ken Norton, "I don't see any of the old Foreman confidence in there—the guy that beat you, Kenny!"

Cosell was right; Foreman didn't have the old confidence. But he had something better, something he didn't have before the Ali fight: the memory of what it felt like to lose. And when Lyle dropped him in the fourth, that is what lifted him off the canvas and drove him to floor Lyle in the same round ("Now, George fought back! George fought back!" Cosell screamed from ringside), and what picked him up too when Lyle dropped him yet again in the same fourth round with a crunching overhand right.

"I knew I had to get up," Foreman said years later. "I knew that if I didn't, the media would all say, 'What are your excuses now, George?'"

I really didn't know what I was watching there in those harrowing, breathtaking 20 minutes, as the two went back and forth, first one hurt and staggering around the ring, then the other. Not really, anyway. Sure, it was a singularly magnificent slugfest, two bomb-throwing behemoths banging away at one another, trading knockdowns, each pausing only to gasp for air between assaults. The brutality of it was positively hypnotic. Today, watching it on youtube, its effects are no less profound. There was no defense by either guy: big, power-punching, world-class heavyweights just throwing, and landing. Over and over. Brilliant.

Watching the fight unfold and explode onto my parents' box-cabinet, floor-model television set, round after head-numbing round, was the most enthralling event I'd witnessed in my 11 years on the planet. By the wonderful, miraculous end in the fifth, I was as breathless and sweaty and exhausted, as were the fighters. And as relieved. But all I really knew was that my guy had won. Foreman had won and that was good. He hadn't let me down. He wasn't a fraud. I hadn't the self-awareness yet to understand what it really meant, and why it was so important: It meant that there was hope for Foreman yet in his comeback, and that, by extension, there was for me too.

BOBBY CASSIDY W 10 CHRISTY ELLIOTT

By Robert Cassidy

There are few moments in athletics that can test one's soul as those that a man spends confronting and beating back his fears before he takes the long walk to the ring. As a child, I endured many of those moments. Not preparing myself to fight, instead watching my father prepare to fight.

One such occasion came when I was 12 years old and about to witness the greatest fight I have ever seen.

As regulars inside my father's dressing room, my brother, Chris, and I watched him shadow box and stretch his limbs. We'd watch as his hands were taped and all the while he'd wink or smile at us as we sat in silence off in the corner of the room. Often when a man embarks on a trying endeavor, he surrounds himself with those close to him. My father's closest friends were always inside that room. I remember Burt Young, the actor, on hand and, as always, his manager, Paddy Flood, tried to keep the atmosphere light.

Everybody in the dressing room is subordinate to the fighter. Everyone is serving him. Passing on to him positive vibes, verbal or silent. We may not have been going into the ring with him, but our passion was. While there was always tension inside the dressing room, it was only the excitement that reached us. My father's smile and Paddy's jokes shielded us from the anxiety of how real and how important this fight was to us all. By 1977, my father was 33 years old and his career was winding down. This fight against Christy Elliott, a 25-year-old looking for a steppingstone, would largely determine whether my father would fight on or fade into retirement.

We'd been in my father's dressing room before and there was always that time when Paddy would walk over to us, kneel down, put his big, fleshy hands on our knees, and say, "Okay, boys, it's time to wish your father luck." It was more of a ritual than a requirement, because the outcome of his fights seldom depended on Lady Luck in the corner, but the left hand sheathed in Everlast's finest leather. Still, as if on cue, we'd rise from our seats and wish him luck. My father would kiss us on the cheeks and nod to one of his friends, who dutifully took us out to ringside. That's the last we'd see of him until the ring announcer bellowed, " ... and in this corner, the pride of Levittown, Long Island, "Irish Bob-bee Cassidy."

Before leaving for our seats, though, I'd watch a metamorphosis occur that few sons can witness so definitively. I'd watch my father become Bobby Cassidy, the fighter. When a soldier beats death on the battlefield he often develops a look known as "the thousand-yard stare," a piercing look that suggests a necessary detachment from emotion. In sports, that's known as the game face. As my father's fight drew near, his countenance hardened and the smile disappeared. His focus was locked onto his opponent and the ensuing battle. His intensity began to slowly rise and the shadowboxing was soon accompanied by short grunts. The punches moved quicker. They started to snap. He was finding a rhythm to syncopate his battle march. The nonchalance had turned to purpose.

In the previous year, Elliott fought to a draw with future champ Mike Rossman and lost a majority decision to Emile Griffith. This was clearly his time. At a press conference before the fight, Lou Duva, who was managing Elliott, said that his charge was going to, "knock Bobby Cassidy right into Paddy Flood's lap."

I did not understand the bravado in Duva's statement—although he jokingly reminds me of it each time I see him. To me, his words were basically a call-out by the schoolyard bully. It set the tone of the event and, in my mind, raised the level of anxiety. Jimmy Winters promoted the bout, and he dreamed up the concept of the "Irish-American Light Heavyweight Title." The pitch was that my father was the best Irish-American 175-pounder and Elliott was the best in that division from the auld sod. The fans bought it. The Commack Arena, home of the Long Island Ducks minor-league hockey team, was filled with about 5,000 people.

The drone of bag pipes began to echo throughout the arena as Elliott, a Dubliner who represented Ireland in the 1972 Olympics, made his way to the ring. My father, who often entered to the same sounds, instead chose the theme to *Rocky*, as a nod to Young, who would be working his corner on this night.

I had seen my father fight before this night and the action in the ring was almost an abstraction. Yes, there was a man hitting my father, but my father was hitting him back harder. The violence and pain were distant to me. Elliott quickly changed that perspective. I was sitting ringside (two rows from the ring) and had my first poignant illustration of boxing's violence.

In the first round, Elliott landed a right hand that spilled my father onto the canvas. All of a sudden the violence became real. That man struggling with consciousness was my father. My hero had been floored.

Commack, New York, June 18, 1977

Chris and Bobby Cassidy celebrate with their father following Elliott fight

Elliott strutted to a neutral corner with his hands raised in the air. My father reached for the bottom rope so he could climb back to his feet. He beat the count. He would later tell me that the sight of Elliott walking around the ring—on Long Island no less—inspired him to rise off the canvas. "This ain't over yet," he told me.

My father steadied himself, trying to find the feeling in his legs, trying to brace himself for the attack that was sure to come. With the mandatory eight-count issued, Elliott raced across the ring, certain that victory was moments away. He began to fire punches. My father's back was against the ropes. He was weathering the storm. Suddenly, his feet were back firmly beneath him and he fired a looping left from his southpaw stance. *Boom!* Elliott was down. My stomach was churning. This was scary. This was a fight.

My parents were divorced at the time, but my mother still came to my father's fights. Between the first and second round, Chris and I ran to where my mother was sitting. There we stayed for 10 tumultuous rounds.

The second round was slow as both fighters pawed at each other, neither fully recovered, neither ready to commit to battle again. But by the fourth round, my father was ready. Instead of moving gingerly around the ring, he began to march toward Elliott. Like a good Irishman, Elliott responded to the challenge. The middle rounds of the fight (four, five, six, and seven) rolled violently by as the butterflies still fluttered in my belly. A round is always three minutes on the clock, but the same 180 seconds can be an eye-blink or an eternity when you're emotionally tied to a close fight. To the eye of a 12-year-old whose entire life was invested in the outcome of this bout, the action never waned. This was no less dramatic than "The Thrilla In Manila" and the pace just as furious.

Like the shadow boxing we witnessed in his dressing room, my father's punches now snapped with purpose. Just the way he taught us in the basement of our Levittown home, he threw his punches in threes—jab-left hand-right hook. Then, sometimes, he doubled the hook, sometimes landing the second hook to the body.

Elliott made his last stand in the seventh round. The fighting started out in the center of the ring and Elliott landed a right hand flush on my father's jaw. For a moment, he wobbled back onto his heels. Elliott immediately sensed the impact of the blow and stepped forward. Another right hand glanced the top of my father's head. From where I was now sitting, in the upper sphere of the arena, it looked as if it could be a knock-out blow. But my father remained firm, his resolve solid. He fired back with the left hand, willing to trade on the spot. Another left landed, then another, and Elliott retreated.

I did not know it yet, but the fight was over. Elliott spent the final three rounds in survival mode. My father, who had spent the better part of the last four years in the top 10, had broken the younger man's will. I waited nervously as they tabulated the scorecards. I had no idea how to score a fight at the time, had no idea my father led comfortably. When they announced that my father had won a unanimous decision, the arena erupted. From my seat, I saw a neighbor from up the block, Jimmy Silk, charge into the ring and lift my father into the air.

It was finally over. And with the victory came tears. I wasn't sure what else to do. When we were led into my father's dressing room, he could see that I had been crying. "What's the matter, Robbie?" he said to me. "You guys are my lucky charms, I never lose when you are here."

He was right. We saw my father fight in person about 10 times. He never lost. Of all those nights, it was the Christy Elliott fight that stays with me. The words of Lou Duva loomed so large in my mind, the reputation Elliott carried into the ring was so frightening. To me, it was worth so much more than the "Irish-American Light Heavyweight Title."

When I told my father I was writing this story, I said, "Dad, I remember that fight like it was yesterday."

"You remember it like it was yesterday," he replied. "I'm still feeling it like it was yesterday."

Then he winked, the same way he did when I was 12 years old and sitting in his dressing room.

MATT FRANKLIN KO 12 MARVIN JOHNSON

By Nigel Collins

As promoter J Russell Peltz slid the tape into the VCR, I felt a bit like a guy who was about to see an old girlfriend for the first time in almost 30 years. Time plays funny tricks with your memory, and although it wasn't an old flame I was revisiting, it was something near and dear to my heart—the best fight I've ever seen.

I had not watched it since the summer night I sat ringside at the Spectrum, hardly able to believe what was transpiring before my eyes. Could the fight really have been as breathtakingly thrilling as I remembered? Or was my judgment clouded by nostalgia for my youth? After all, Bob Marley, Jimi Hendrix, and Bob Dylan still top my pantheon of musical greats. Maybe I was trapped in a time warp in more ways than one.

Bellbottoms, long hair, and cheesy kung fu movies aside, the 1970s was also the last golden era of Philadelphia boxing. Casino gambling in nearby Atlantic City would soon change the economic equation and turn Philly into a city of gyms and clubfights. But before that happened, there was one final glorious run of fights, sponsored by the Spectrum, and Franklin-Johnson, in terms of unadulterated mayhem, was its zenith.

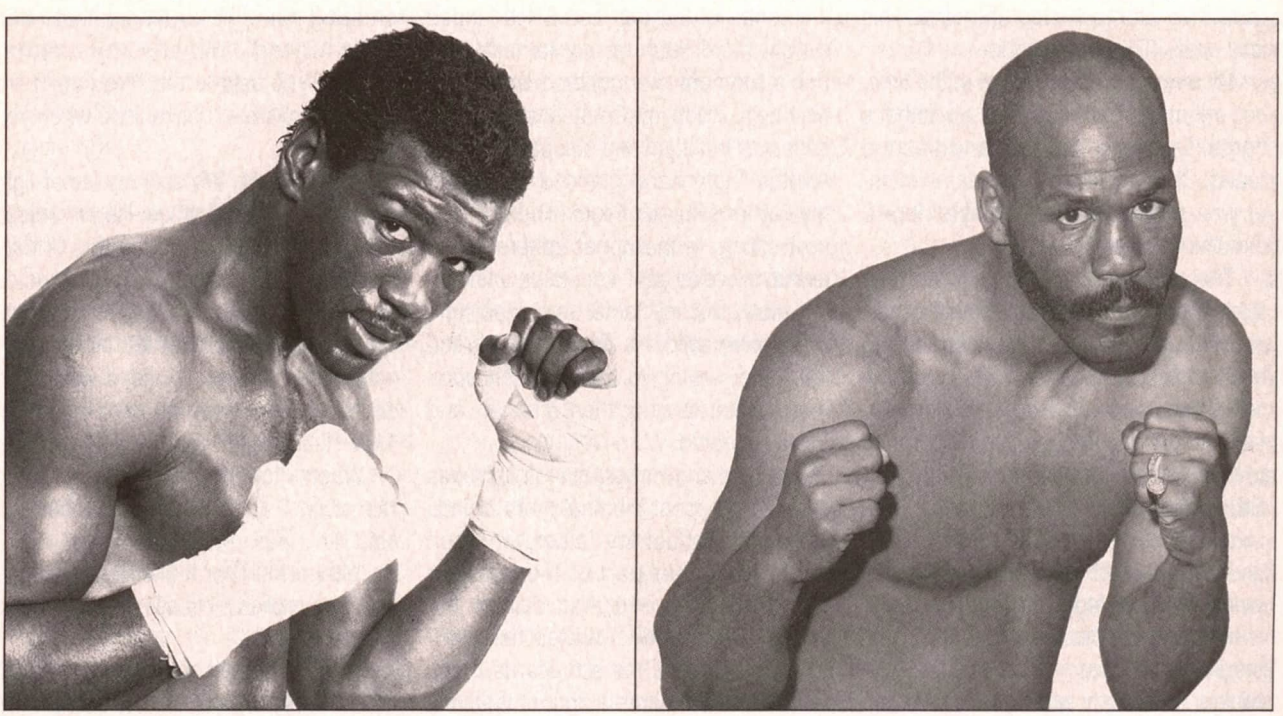
Franklin, 22, was a budding local favorite who would become a Hall of Famer after changing his name to Matthew Saad Muhammad. Model handsome and outgoing, his smile was almost as big as his punch.

The stoic Johnson, with his receding hairline and distinctive mutton-chop whiskers, was an undefeated 23-year-old from Indianapolis who had been embraced by the Philadelphia fans after a first-round blowout of Wayne McGee the previous year.

Those who remember Franklin as a back-from-the-brink miracle man may be surprised to learn that he didn't always fight with the reckless abandon that made him famous. He had the physical tools to box intelligently, but felt he'd been robbed against Eddie Gregory (Eddie Mustafa Muhammad) earlier that year, and swore he would never again allow the judges to deprive him of victory.

The Johnson fight was the first test of Franklin's new resolve and the night his legend first began to take shape.

The opening round was brisk, but gave little hint of the anarchy to follow.



Franklin and Johnson took it to the max

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 26, 1977

Then, in the second round, they declared war. Johnson intensified the tempo of his attack and began to slam home left uppercuts that sliced through Franklin's guard and snapped his head back as if it was attached to a hinge. Franklin returned fire with searing combinations, and at one point, they stood directly in front of each other, whacking away with flush punches in an incredible exchange that foreshadowed what was to follow.

In the third, Johnson belayed Franklin with one of those prolonged barrages that might have prompted many of today's skittish referees to call a premature halt. But Ozzie Saddler just let them do their thing. I think he was enjoying it as much as everybody else.

When Franklin rocked Johnson with a right in the fourth, the members of the audience who were still sitting down leapt to their feet with a roar worthy of 10 times their number. Johnson responded with a counterattack, punctuated by a left uppercut that turned the trickle of blood flowing from Franklin's nose into a torrent. Then it was Franklin's turn again.

And so it went, back and forth, back and forth, as these two young men at the peak of their physical prowess took turns raining havoc upon one another. Johnson was machine-like, cranking up one blistering combination after another, at times literally throwing himself at Franklin in a leaping attempt to land a conclusive blow. Franklin, like a comic book superhero come to life, repeatedly rallied from the edge of disaster to land crippling punches.

The fight took on a life of its own, and everybody in the building was caught up in the frenzy. Even the ushers and security guards were cheering.

Both men launched Kamikaze attacks in the 10th, taking the fight to new heights of barbarity. They traded punches at such an inconceivable rate that I recall thinking that both men would die, right there in the ring in front of me. Concern bordering on panic battled it out with near-euphoric exhilaration for control of my emotions.

Johnson probably shouldn't have come out for the 11th, but there's no half-stepping with fighters such as him. Like a bullet shot from a gun, there was no turning back.

As the round drew to a close, Franklin drilled Johnson with a succession of brain-scrambling rights that had him stumbling helplessly in search of sanctuary. Had Saddler not interrupted matters prematurely, thinking he'd heard the bell, there probably wouldn't have been a 12th round.

Appropriately, the fight was dead even on the scorecards going into the final round. Harold Lederman had Franklin ahead, 51-48, Paul Harris had it even at 51-51, while Saddler had Johnson in front, 53-49. Deadline writers were already scrambling for superlatives. Whatever happened next, everybody at the Spectrum knew they were witnessing a classic.

The conclusion, which came at the 1:12 mark, was fittingly ferocious. Franklin came out quickly, seemingly reinvigorated by his success the previous round. Johnson absorbed a succession of wicked shots to the head that caused his legs to stumble in one direction, while his body lurched in another.

Finally, instinctively grasping the middle rope for support, Johnson collapsed to the canvas, where he lay on his back, staring up at the Spectrum ceiling with unseeing eyes. For what seemed like an eternity, he stayed there unattended, as a chaotic celebration erupted around him.

"The thing I remember most was going to the hotel to see how Marvin was doing," recalled Peltz. "We found him on the floor outside of his room, his key in his hand. He was conscious, but too exhausted to unlock the door."

Miraculously, Johnson rebounded to win the WBC light heavyweight title the following year, only to lose it to Franklin in his first defense. The resilient slugger would go on to twice capture the WBA title before retiring in 1987 and becoming a prison guard.

For Franklin, the fight set the pattern for a series of extraordinary come-from-behind victories that would make him one of the most popular fighters of his time and eventually carry him to Canastota. But regardless of the more famous brawls that followed, there was never one that topped his first fight with Johnson.

The 6,459 paying customers in the building that night took home an indelible memory and the lifelong satisfaction of knowing they'd been part of something very special. The Spectrum made a profit of less than $4,000. Franklin and Johnson pocketed just $2,500 each, minus taxes.

But some things simply can't be measured in numbers. For me, the ultimate payoff came nearly three decades later, when the magic of videotape proved that not all memories are distorted by the fog of time and that true greatness is eternal.

ROGER MAYWEATHER W 12 HAROLD BRAZIER

By David Mayo

Roger Mayweather and Harold Brazier tore into each other with a vivid emotion rooted in motivational purity. Their conflicts ran deep, both personally and professionally. But most of all, as they passionately pounded each other, somehow mutually willing themselves never to fall, their biggest conquests came against the challenges within.

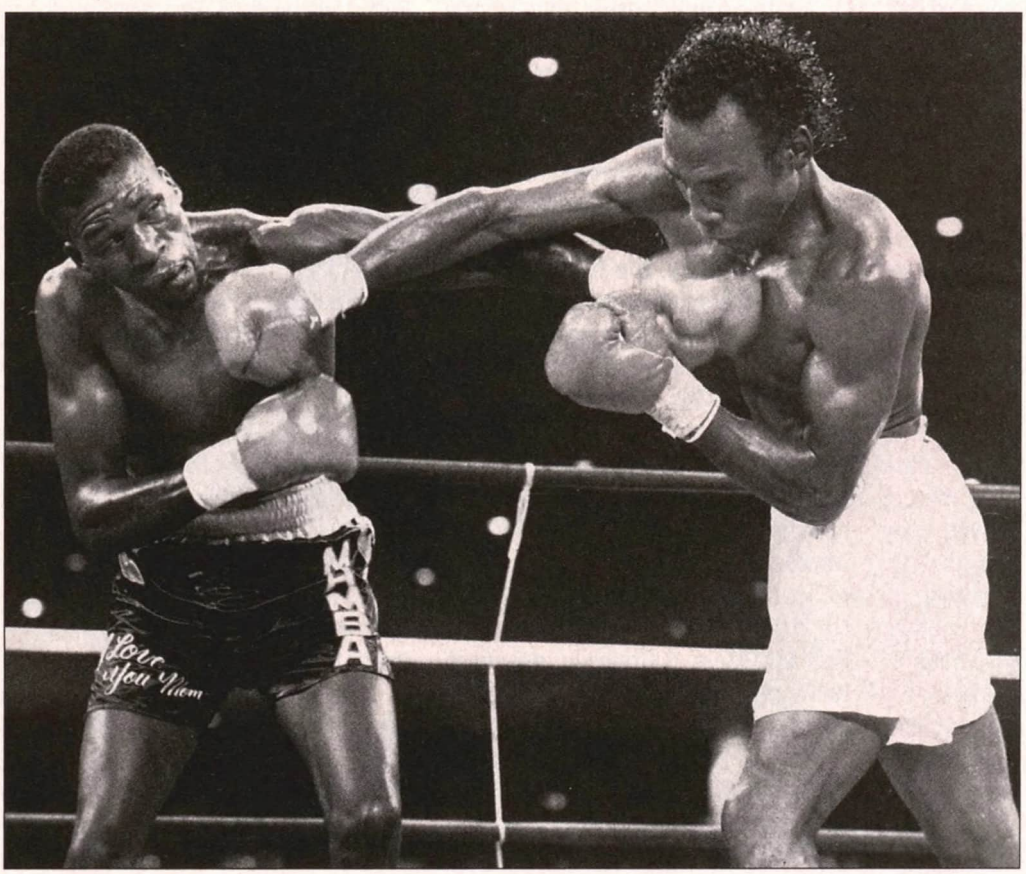
In the weeks beforehand, Mayweather intimately described to me his years of problems with the Internal Revenue Service, and I ate ice cream with the Brazier family at Bonnie Doon's in South Bend, Indiana. On fight night, Mayweather fired right hands at tax problems of his own doing, which gnawed at him through years of upset losses. Brazier counterpunched for a larger home, where his four children wouldn't need bunk beds. Still, regardless of what happened, both men knew financial security remained at least one fight away for the winner, and many more for the loser.

They weren't fighting just each other. They were fighting themselves. And they created a lost masterpiece that was virtually forgotten by night's end.

In retrospect, the iffy resolution, with Mayweather banking early rounds and winning a split decision because he managed to stand until the final bell, and Brazier still able to question the decision for the identical reason, seems appropriate on many levels.

For one, their fabulous effort at show-stealing melodrama, with each man reeling almost perpetually during the championship rounds, was overshadowed moments later by Iran Barkley's thunderbolt left hook against Thomas Hearns in the main event.

Also, while Mayweather and Brazier will find themselves listed high in each other's obituary, neither admits it was their most rugged fight. Mayweather said his probably was against Mario Martinez; Brazier said his probably was Kevin Pompey. Between the two of them, they had 199 professional fights, so they have ample opportunity for argument.



Mayweather and Brazier brawl to a split decision

And while both men would achieve their personal financial objectives, neither would do so that night. Mayweather and Brazier both fought for several more years, and made their biggest purses against other opponents.

Yet as they competed on near-even terms that night at the Las Vegas Hilton, their shared earnestness belied their obvious differences: May-

Las Vegas, Nevada, June 6, 1986

weather, the established titleholder, bachelor, boastful, and acid-tongued; Brazier, the nondescript challenger, family man, humble, and curse-free.

Inside the ropes, Mayweather was known for one-punch endings, both in victory and defeat. Brazier knocked out the entire midwestern circuit to get a title shot, and his conditioning was above reproach. But his power proved just enough to keep Mayweather wobbly during the second half of the fight, and no more. That allowed Mayweather to fire back with his own best shots, which Brazier absorbed only because of his fanatical conditioning.

They were made to destroy each other. In many ways, they did.

"I never want to see Harold Brazier again," Mayweather told me afterward.

Both fought on a championship level for several more years. But for Mayweather, whose financial problems were created by failing to file tax returns for 1983 and '84—the years of his first title reign—that burden would not be lifted until after his next fight. Mayweather made $100,000 for beating Brazier, then $225,000 for beating Vinny Pazienza, after which the IRS stopped attaching his purses. He never had another win as big as either of those, although he did set himself up financially by losing his title to Julio Cesar Chavez for about $800,000 the next year. Brazier made $35,000 for fighting Mayweather, then returned to the small white house in South Bend. He would get another 140-pound title shot, against Juan Martin Coggi, and lose again, before earning $190,000 to fight Pernell Whitaker in '91. Like Mayweather, Brazier was unable to find many noteworthy victories for the rest of his career, but had become so business-savvy that he paid out only 10 percent of the Whitaker purse to hired help.

"After that fight, we were finally able to build that new house, and we left the neighborhood," Brazier said. "I like to say that Pernell Whitaker built my house for me. I paid cash for it. It was a blessing."

Mayweather won, but came out of the fight in worse shape. The next morning, he blacked out while driving away from the Las Vegas Hilton, totaled his BMW, shattered his windshield with his head, and required 28 stitches to close gashes in his knee and elbow.

"Harold Brazier is bad luck for me," Mayweather said later that day, in his hotel room, where he would remain holed up for another night, after doctors chastised him for operating a vehicle just hours after such a grueling fight.

Mayweather remains a major figure in boxing today, as a trainer, most notably of his nephew, Floyd Mayweather. His effort 19 years ago, by a once-deposed champion hoping to extend his shelf life and beat back the taxman, helped keep Mayweather viable in the boxing business throughout his adult life.

The Brazier tale, while starkly different, also ended where it began. Brazier's background was in martial arts, not amateur boxing, which he took up at 24. A diligent worker who had been employed at an automobile dealership since age 15—another contrast to Mayweather, who never held a job outside of boxing—Brazier became proficient as a bodywork specialist, which he did for the better part of two decades, until two years after the Whitaker fight.

In 1993, he went from repairing cars to selling them, which he has done ever since. He enjoys the honest work for the honest dollar, which is precisely how he approached his boxing career, ultimately working himself into an unlikely title shot that became unforgettable to its witnesses.

"I hate to reminisce on it sometimes," Brazier said, "because I have always believed that if I had relaxed a little more, not tried to throw so many punches, and not been so anxious early in the fight, I think I would've been world champion. Most people thought I won anyway, except for two of the three judges."

Brazier launched a brief comeback in 2003, in part because he and his wife of 28 years, Margaret, added a fifth child to their family 10 years ago, and the youngest boy never had seen his father box. Today, at 51, the grandfather of six seems more inclined to pursue those new family interests than hit a heavybag or pound out miles of roadwork during the northern Indiana winters.

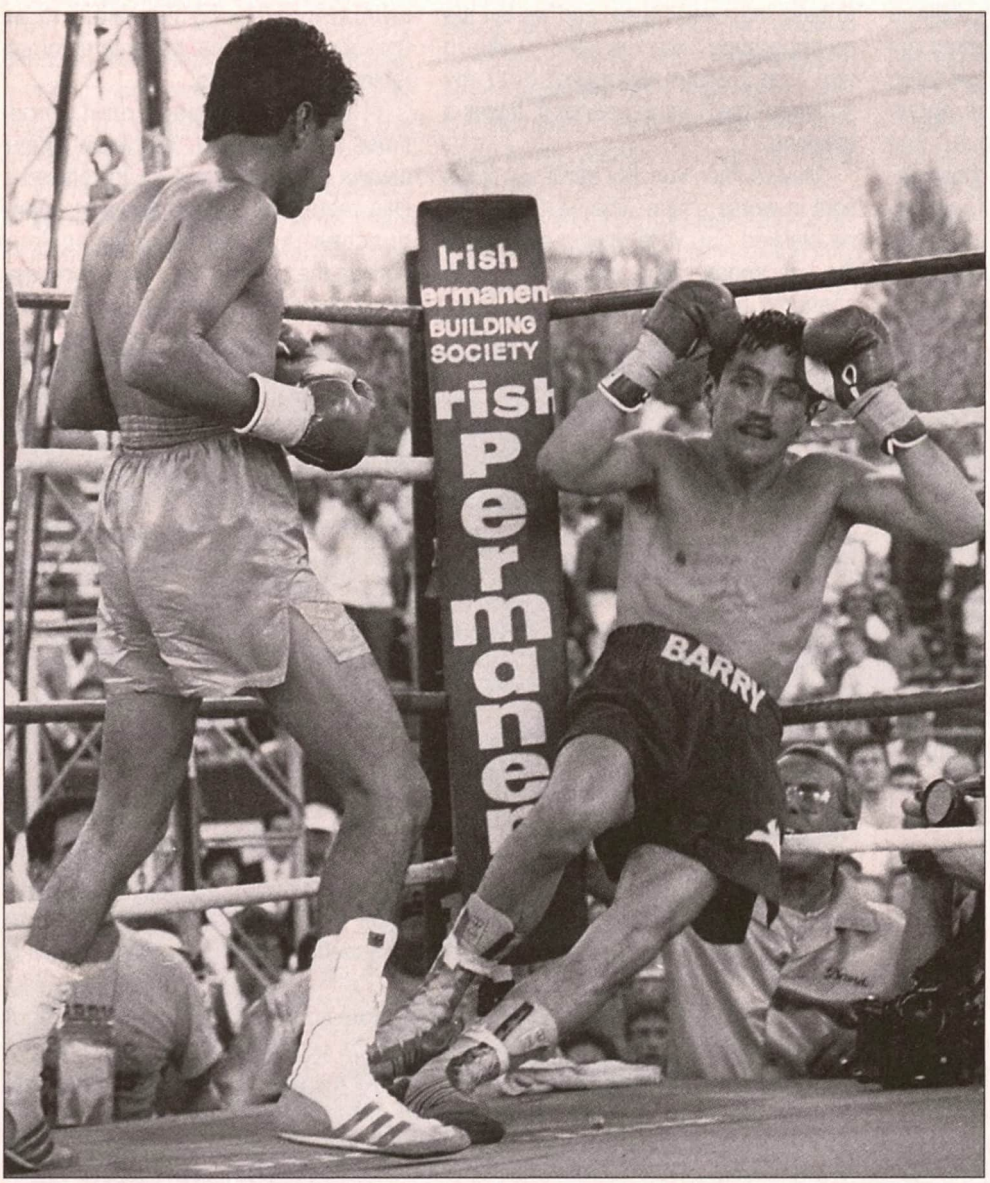
Save for the few age lines and specks of gray, their personalities remain essentially unchanged. Mayweather still cuts the same bold, brash figure now as then. And Brazier is still a picture of humility who reflects on that night in 1988 as a grand opportunity vanished, though he remains proud of the pitiless method he shared with Mayweather as they reeled under each other's punches, and the security his family gained from boxing.

"That wasn't the fight that molded me and helped me build character," Brazier reflected. "I had gotten that a long time before that fight, from God."

STEVE CRUZ W 15 BARRY McGUIGAN

By Don Stradley

I got hooked on boxing not by anything I'd seen on television, but by an article. One of my earliest boxing memories was buying an issue of THE RING and reading a section called "The Greatest Fight I Ever Saw," written by the writers of the day such as Dan Daniel and the magazine's founder, Nat Fleischer. The bouts mentioned included the first encounter between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling, and Jack Dempsey's hell-raiser with Luis Firpo. I was in second grade and could barely read, but those old battles sounded like Arthurian legends being passed down from one generation to the next.



Cruz floors McGuigan during duel in the desert

Now I've come full circle. I'm writing for THE RING and I've been asked to pick the greatest fight I ever saw. I was surprised by my choice: Steve Cruz' 1986 upset win over Barry McGuigan.

My choice surprised me because Cruz-McGuigan, although it was voted THE RING's Fight of the Year, hasn't become a major part of boxing history. It's rarely mentioned nowadays, and probably wouldn't make too many people's list of "important" or "great" fights. But as soon as the question was posed to me, the immediate image that came to mind was of McGuigan careening backward across the ring as the Nevada sun beat down on him. Well, Cruz' fists had something to do with it too, but the fight is usually remembered as the time McGuigan came to America and wilted in the Las Vegas heat.

Pushing the fuzzy image out of my mind, I gave the question some more thought. Surely something involving Sugar Ray Leonard or Muhammad Ali would make for

Las Vegas, Nevada, June 23, 1986

a better story. Ali-Frazier, brought me into boxing after all, and as far as I'm concerned, March 8, 1971, is still the biggest date in boxing history. But since Cruz and McGuigan came to my mind first, I decided to honor my gut instinct.

Cruz-McGuigan was part of a Top Rank show at Caesars Palace that featured Tommy Hearns in the main event against Mark Medal. The co-feature was Robbie Sims against Roberto Duran. Cruz and McGuigan was the opening bout on the closed-circuit telecast. I was living in Boston and had talked two friends into joining me at the Orpheum Theater, where these fights were to be shown on a Tuesday night. The Orpheum was a ratty old building near Park Street where bands played. It wasn't unusual for vermin to run across your feet as you watched a concert, and while there was always a $2 "reconstruction" fee slapped onto all tickets, there was never any noticeable reconstruction. Still, I adored the shaggy old place. I'd seen Lou Reed nearly blow the building apart with a guitar solo, and I'd seen Iggy Pop attack a fan with a microphone stand. Playwright Sam Shepard once said that a rock concert had 10 times the impact of a title fight. Sometimes I agreed with him, but I had a suspicion that boxing, at its best, was better than rock 'n' roll; I was about to find out for myself.

McGuigan, the WBA featherweight titlist, was the darling of Ireland. His relentless style, his rowdy fans, his father singing "Danny Boy," all made for great television. His opponent, Steve Cruz, was a replacement for Fernando Sosa. It was supposed to be an easy night for McGuigan, who was on his way to a big featherweight unification bout with Azumah Nelson. *Wouldn't it be wild*, I thought, *if Cruz ruined everybody's plans and won, or at least knocked McGuigan down?* I secretly hoped the kid would give McGuigan a fight.

Every fighter has a day where he fights better than he ever has before and ever will again, and Cruz had one of those days. He had an answer for everything McGuigan did. During the 10th, just as McGuigan seemed to be gaining ground, Cruz dropped him with a quick left hook to the chin. More trouble came in the 11th when McGuigan was penalized a point for fouling. By then McGuigan, who'd been installed as a 5-1 favorite, was asking his corner to pray for him. It happened at just the right moment—the Orpheum audience, made up of young guys from the nearby colleges and cranky old boxing fans, had suddenly gone quiet, just in time to hear Barry's plea. But praying wouldn't help, not when it was 110 degrees and his whole world was coming apart.

The Orpheum crowd started chanting, "Here we go, here we go, here were gooooo!" as we'd heard the Irish fans do on television, hoping our support would transmit through the screen and into the Nevada dessert. Then, as always happens in great fights, the tide turned. Using more desperation than skill, the Irishman won the 13th and 14th, and it looked like he might retain his title. Cruz, though, lived up to his nickname of "Super Kid" and knocked McGuigan down twice more in the 15th to edge ahead on all three scorecards.

When the scores were read in Cruz' favor, I felt as if I'd witnessed something special. Upsets are fascinating in any sport, but especially in boxing. Of course, we in Boston had no way of knowing that McGuigan faced some scary moments after the fight. Badly dehydrated and suffering a massive headache, he kept asking for his wife even though she was standing right next to him. Covered in ice packs, McGuigan was wheeled out of Caesars and rushed to Valley Hospital for a CAT scan and an overnight stay. We didn't know about McGuigan's crisis. We only knew that Hearns, Medal, Duran, and Sims had been blown away by their opening act.

Neither fighter was the same afterward. McGuigan vanished for two years, came back for a few bouts, and then retired for good after losing to Jim McDonnell. Cruz, a plumber's assistant from Fort Worth, Texas, lost the title the first time he defended it; he had a mediocre career until he retired in 1993.

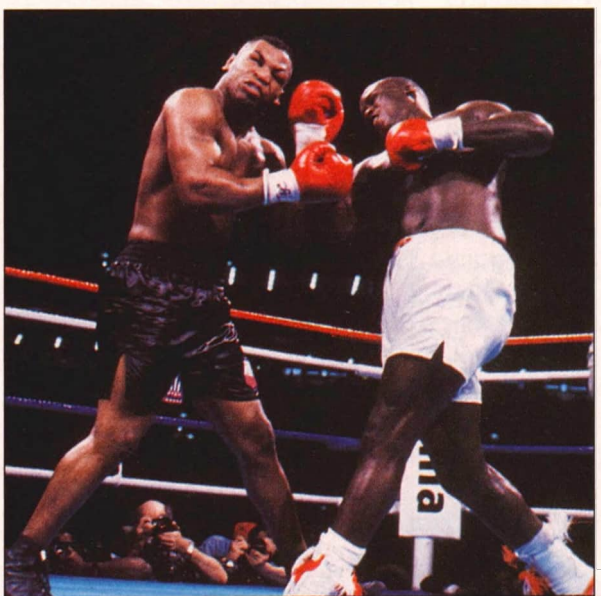
I may have been rooting against McGuigan, but thinking back, it was McGuigan who made the fight great. He was out of his element and having a bad night, but when Cruz seemed to be pulling ahead, McGuigan would come pounding back and win a round. If there's anything as exciting as watching an unheralded kid win a boxing title, it's watching a proud champion fight furiously to keep his belt, even as he's going down in flames. Cruz-McGuigan gave us both.

BUSTER DOUGLAS KO 10 MIKE TYSON

By Don Stewart

"My plan is to stand toe-to-toe and trade. I might have been dropped 38 times in my career, but I can take a punch."

Those words came from my dad, sitting in the tiny diner where my mom worked back on February 11, 1990, pretending to read a newspaper story on that night's Mike Tyson-Buster Douglas fight. He was "quoting" Douglas, a 42-1 underdog whom we knew almost nothing about despite the fact that he was from my home state of Ohio.



Douglas strikes a mighty blow for underdogs everywhere

I was laughing hysterically, just as I always did when my dad did this. The news was always a lot more interesting when my dad read it, like the time he "dictated" a story about Roger Clemens accidentally decapitating a beer guy in the stands with a fastball. It was like *The Onion* before *The Onion* was invented. But if my dad had somehow been reading a report of the actual fight a day early, I probably would have been laughing even harder.

Of course, Tyson was still invincible, still perfect, still the baddest man on the planet. His last name was a synonym for "tough" in my 12-year-old mind. Most of his opponents were so intimidated that the fight was over before the opening bell. The thought of someone, especially a nobody like Douglas, saying they were going to trade with Tyson was comically absurd.

I had a strange relationship with Iron Mike. Loved the way he fought, loved his black trunks and shoes, loved his pre-introductions head roll that was like the flicking of his fury switch. But I also despised him for his dominance. Wanting someone to beat Tyson is what first sucked me into the sport. I'd pick up boxing magazines with whatever money I could dig up at the time. I'd pour over the ratings, the records, and the results. I'd make lists in study hall of potential spoilers (pretty sure Buster never made the cut).

Though I probably didn't realize it back then, for me, Tyson also represented the powerful. My parents had just separated, right before the bank foreclosed on our house. I was living with my mom and three younger brothers at the tiny home of my maternal grandparents, who must have been insane for taking us in. My mom eventually would work third shift at a factory while collecting welfare and food stamps for a short time before getting back on track. My dad would have to go through a bankruptcy to keep his small business.

To me, the world was Tyson, unbeatable and unmerciful. To me,

February 11, 1990, Tokyo, Japan

Douglas was just another dream destined to be crushed.

I'd heard about Greg Page dropping Tyson in sparring, but I still didn't give this guy any chance. Buster was what you called your neighbor's mutt or some wife-beating drunk who drove around in a rusty pickup truck, not a heavyweight contender. HBO's prefight feature revealed the recent death of Buster's mother and showed him with icicles on his face as he did his morning roadwork, and I instantly liked the guy. Still didn't think he could win. Happy endings for underdogs only happened in the movies.

Then we saw Tyson wearing an expensive fur coat as he arrived in Tokyo. I can't remember what he said in the prefight segment. Whatever it was angered my religious grandmother, who was watching from the small TV in the kitchen. Little old Grandma Eve, who was no fight fan, was suddenly yelling something about pride bringing the downfall. She stayed up to watch.

And then it all unfolded: Unintimidated Buster getting through the first round. Buster using his reach, hands near his chest, to persistently pop an incoming Tyson with hard jabs and right crosses. Tyson's bombs just missing Buster's head. Buster getting more confident. Buster staring Tyson down at the end of each round. Tyson slowing down. Tyson getting more stationary. The swelling eye. The water-filled condom balloon. Cut-away shots to a distraught Evander Holyfield, who was watching the richest fight of all-time disintegrate.

It was becoming increasingly surreal, as if one of my dad's imaginary newspaper articles was coming true before our eyes. My grandfather used to storm out of his room and shut off the TV late at night when we'd get too noisy watching fights on ESPN and USA. But now even he was staying up to watch this 6'3" David slowly slaying the 5'11" Goliath. And I was believing. This guy who grew up only a couple hours away was freaking beating Mike Tyson. I was holding my breath as each Hail Mary shot from a still dangerous Tyson barely whizzed past Buster's head.

Then Tyson slammed that perfect uppercut off the ropes into Buster's jaw in the eighth, and reality came screeching back into focus like a hangover after a foggy night out. My stomach hit the floor with Buster. Actually, one of my brothers literally fell off the couch and landed face-first on the living-room carpet. But Buster just punched the canvas, took his time to get up at nine, was saved by the bell, and then went back to chopping away at Tyson in the ninth. Surrealism resumed. No one had ever hit Tyson like this. The same guy who'd quit against Tony Tucker three years before was as inspired on this night as any heavyweight challenger in history.

We were all yelling too much to hear Jim Lampley's call when Tyson went down, fumbled pathetically for his mouthpiece, and failed to beat referee Octavio Meyran's count. I'd heard stories about people dancing in the streets after Joe Louis whipped Max Schmeling, and thought it was unbelievable. But I was so ecstatic I could have done anything. I settled for trying to call my best friend. His perturbed mother made me aware that it was almost midnight.

"Well, just tell him Mike Tyson got beat!" I yelled, probably sounding like an escaped mental patient.

"Uh-huh ... okay," she said, totally confused, as she hung up the phone.

That was the night I graduated from boxing fan to boxing addict. I tried to take up the sport, but was vetoed by my dad, a former Golden Gloves champ who said my grades were too good. ("Now, if your brothers want to fight ..."). As I got into this whole sportswriting thing, I knew it would only be a matter of time before I was hanging out in gyms and talking to fighters.

Meanwhile, "Buster" instantly became synonymous with "spoiler," as people compared him to Rocky. Cheesy and clichéd as it sounds, his win gave me some hope, sort of like how Jimmy Braddock's upset of Max Baer lifted some spirits back during the Great Depression. Any inspiration from that fight quickly faded. But I've always invoked Buster's name whenever I've overachieved. Whether it was high school sports, becoming the first member of my family to get a college degree, or landing my future fiancée, it was always "the greatest upset since Douglas-Tyson."

There certainly have been plenty of better fights in terms of action, quality, even drama. Tyson was unfocused and unprepared, and Buster fought the fight of his life. But I don't think one single fight will ever mean as much to me as that surreal upset back when I was on the brink of adolescence, staring across the ring at a seemingly invincible world. That's why, to me, it's the greatest fight I ever saw.

LENNOX LEWIS KO 7 FRANK BRUNO

By Gavin Evans

This one might seem an odd pick: one of Lewis' worst performances against a local rival, who, let's face it, was never seriously top drawer. But there are three reasons for this choice: First, a fan's relation to a fight has as much to do with intangibles like partisanship as with what happens inside the ropes—and despite my reporter's hat, I was a Lewis partisan; second, what happens outside the ropes can exacerbate the tension within the arena, and in this case Bruno *hated* Lewis; third, the fight itself was hot, not least because Lewis fought well below par and Bruno well above.

I had applied late for press accreditation, having just returned from my father's funeral, and so was seated just beyond the hallowed square, next to Britain's number-one man on the greens, Nick Faldo. Naturally, I did my best to impress the gracious golfer with my boxing knowledge. When he asked my opinion, I pronounced with both barrels of my biased heart: "Bruno's just a strong, mechanical, dirty fighter who freezes when clipped on the chin. Lewis is the best heavyweight in the world, so the result is inevitable—four rounds at the most, but it could just as well be a one round job. First time Lennox connects with that right, he's toast." Or something like that. Anyway, he thanked me for my expertise.

By then, I was engrossed in the minutiae of this particularly heated local rivalry, a prelude as bitter as I'd seen in the British ring. It started with Lewis' "trainer" (the quote marks are not gratuitous), Pepe Correa, coming out with classy insults like: "You'll eat your feet. I'm going to take a pillow to ringside for you." He also threw underwear around. Bruno then riled Lewis by going out of his way to cast him as an alien impostor. "He's not British," he sneered. "Nobody cares about Lewis in Britain. I'm the one who's famous." And later: "I'm the true Brit; you're not!" Followed by: "You don't need to be Ironsides to know that the man doesn't live in this country. He's taking the mickey out of the country." And so it went, all the way to Bruno's ring entrance in a Union Jack tracksuit to the sound of "Land Of Hope And Glory."

Referee Vann ends Bruno's brave bid

Lewis, in turn, zeroed in on Frank's weak spot. "You're an Uncle Tom!" he snapped, subsequently explaining he'd leveled this choice insult because Bruno sucked up to the white establishment,

Cardiff, Wales, October 1, 1993

never stood up for black people, and supported the ruling Tory party. An enraged Bruno threatened legal action; Lewis refused to withdraw. The Brunos, Frank and his wife, Laura, responded by casting any press people who wrote positively about Lewis as the enemy, dishing out obscenities.

Bruno's hatred prompted a fearless focus I'd never seen on him before, while Lewis was simply lackadaisical. After all, despite his rival's victories over Carl Williams, Pierre Coetzer, and Jose Ribalta in his previous three outings, Bruno had fallen in two attempts at the big one (against Tim Witherspoon and Mike Tyson). A severe cold and slight temperature did not help Lewis in the final days before the fight, or by the cold front that descended on Cardiff on fight night. A timing mix-up meant he entered the ring to the sound of Bob Marley's anti-racist classic "Crazy Baldheads" ("We're gonna chase those crazy baldheads out of town") without having warmed up properly.

The referee, Mickey Vann (of Whitaker-Chavez notoriety) set the tone of what was to follow. "I don't want no s___ off any of you! Don't give me no s___!" he instructed. Lewis looked like he didn't give a damn; Bruno looked like giving Lewis all the s___ he could handle was the only thing in his life.

I was surprised how well the 238-pound challenger did in the opening round, boxing more fluidly than I'd seen before, with his guard peek-a-boo high, always mindful of the right, while pumping out a brute of a left jab. The lethargic, 229-pound Lewis had to be wrapped with a thick blanket at the end of the round. He was still freezing.

The pattern continued in the second, with Bruno adding to his repertoire by targeting the back of the neck for regular, meaty whacks, eventually prompting Lewis to respond in kind. "Don't f___ with me!" yelled Vann. "Don't act like a couple of tarts. Don't piss me about no more. I don't want no s___!"

It got worse for my man in the third, to the delight of about two thirds of the 30,000-strong crowd who braved the bitter cold and rain, and to my own momentary despair. For all his faults, Bruno was extremely heavy handed, and early in the round he landed his payload overhand right, flush on the side of the jaw. The WBC titleholder's legs dipped momentarily, but he kept his head, and after retreating to the ropes, ducked the follow-up right before clinching. Bruno then got to work by whacking away at the body—heavy punches. In contrast, Lewis' work was clumsy, his timing off, his footwork ragged. Nick Faldo was no longer asking my opinion.

But Lewis gradually started to warm up, getting his jab working and using his reflexes to slip the heavy artillery. In the fifth, he began throwing combinations, cutting and starting to close Bruno's eye. But the challenger was still dishing out jabs, hard rights, and plenty of rabbit punches. It had become a rough, intense, give-and-take battle.

Finally, and to my great relief, Lewis found his rhythm in round six and I started to relax. He was now moving easily, outjabbing Bruno, pushing him back and employing an effective body attack. Bruno was missing with the legitimate stuff, although his rabbit punching was still sharp. By the end of the sixth, the American judges had things even; the Welshman had Bruno up by an absurd four points.

Both corners told their men to go for broke in the seventh. Bruno, his eye in a bad way, charged. Lewis covered up on the ropes and watched, and when Frank dropped his right, ready to fire, Lennox countered with a massive, wide left hook that landed square and extremely hard, effectively ending the challenge.

Bruno's central nervous system closed down and he became a sitting duck. Lewis drove him into the ropes and landed 16 vicious bombs, ending with a sickening uppercut that jerked Bruno's head back alarmingly. Vann stepped in to stop it, or so I assumed. But instead, the foul-mouthed little Yorkshireman led Lewis to a neutral corner for an interminable lecture on the crime of steadying a man's head while trying to lift if off his shoulders. This lasted 10 seconds, but 10 minutes wouldn't have been enough. Bruno's eyes were glazed, his torso slumped. He was incapable of response. After seven more monster punches, ending with a terrifying overhand right to the jaw, Bruno collapsed, the ropes breaking his fall. At 1:10 of the round it was over.

I'm afraid any pretence to objectivity had long since been abandoned. I was up on my feet, bouncing about. Then I looked down at Nick Faldo. "See, what did I tell you!" I yelled. He smiled benignly and shook his head.

RONNIE MAGRAMO KO 10 FAHSANG PONGSAWANG

By Ted Lerner

Exactly 20 years to the day after Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier went to war in their epic across town, I was lucky enough to be ringside at Manila's aging Ninoy Aquino Stadium, doing television commentary for what turned out to be another unforgettable fight. The two protagonists were mini-flyweights whose combined weight didn't even reach that of Ali back in 1975. But the war that ensued that night between the Philippines' Ronnie Magramo, a whirling dervish, never-say-die brawler, and Thailand's Fhasang Pongsawang transcended physical stature. Instead, it became a titanic display of heart in the eternal quest for revenge, redemption, and national pride.

Magramo: "The Toy Bulldog" of the Philippines

The fight also reinforced everything about why I was there in the first place, half a world away from the land of my birth. I had first visited the Philippines four years earlier, mostly for fun and adventure. While I was there, I was reunited with the family of junior lightweight legend and Hall of Famer Flash Elorde. I had become friends with them while announcing their fight promotions in Honolulu in the late-1980s and early-'90s.

It was amazing to see that anywhere I went in the Philippines, the people all knew and loved Flash Elorde. Not just for holding and defending the world title, but also for embodying that most desired Filipino trait: humility. Elorde was a poor boy who made good and, by all accounts, stayed good, the consummate family man and community icon. His family treated me like royalty, offering a red-carpet welcome in a country that can, at times, be rather intimidating.

I returned often to the Philippines after that first trip. There were many attractions for a single American male: the beautiful women, the hospitality of the people, year-round tropical weather, the Filipinos' affection for nearly all things American, especially their historic love of boxing. But if I had to pick a main reason why I kept returning to the country, it would have to be the daily drama that comes with living in the Philippines.

Chaos, both manmade and natural, is an ordinary part of life in this Third World archipelago. Things don't work quite right. Stuff happens. Sometimes miraculously. This is, after all, the country where a housewife brought down a dictator without firing a bullet.

For a college educated Jewish kid from the northeast United States, one might expect me to crave order and predictability. To my surprise, however, I discovered that drama could be addicting. A pampered westerner found out life can be much more interesting when you don't know what's going to happen day-to-day. Even by my own loosened standards, though, I had surely taken it to the extreme. By the time of the Magramo-Pongsawang fight in October 1995, I was pretty much residing in Manila, and my Filipina wife was two weeks away from giving birth to our first child.

The easygoing Magramo seemed primed for drama. He came from a family of itinerant fishermen that lived in a beautiful but destitute province. One day he knocked on the door of Flash's second son, Johnny, in suburban Manila, and said he wanted to

Manila, Philippines, September 30, 1995

become a boxer. Like they do for all the others who come looking to make something of themselves, the Elordes took him in.

This little dynamo proved to be fantastic, a ball of fire, all guts and desire. He fought in Thailand for the WBA and IBF belts, predictably losing both on points. Then, in 1994, again in Thailand, he ended up winning the vacant World Boxing Federation (WBF) 105-pound belt via decision.

The following year in Bangkok, the 18-year-old Pongsawang captured Magramo's belt, winning a unanimous decision. The Filipinos, however, claimed they were robbed because Pongsawang ran and engaged little throughout the fight. The Elordes also complained they weren't treated well by the Thais, and were often left to fend for themselves without rides or notification of the times of various functions.

Thailand vs. the Philippines always offers a natural rivalry, but when the drama-loving Philippine press got word of the controversial decision and the shabby treatment of their compatriots, the subsequent fight scheduled for Manila, dubbed "The Great Rematch," lit a fuse with the Philippine public. Salvation for a nation lay on the small shoulders of a tiny, 22-year-old man they affectionately called "The Toy Bulldog."

Circumstances at fight time only seemed to add more of an edge to the proceedings. A massive typhoon was sweeping through Manila. At the same time, there had been rumors in the press of a *coup de tat*. Even so, approximately 3,000 people turned up to watch the fight. Just like a good soap opera, the fight followed the perfect script. Magramo came out blazing, hands and arms working like a buzz saw. Happily, Pongsawang chose to stand and fight, landing with a blistering right-left combination. He went down in the second, got up, and fought back. Magramo came back even harder. Several prolonged exchanges through the first five rounds sent the crowd into delirium. When the Thai stumbled back to his corner after a raucous fifth, everyone was sure Magramo was about to finish him off.

In the sixth, however, Pongsawang suddenly opened up a cut over Magramo's right eye and the momentum miraculously swung in the Thai's direction. Blood streaming down his face, Magramo became deflated, and took the crowd with him. Pongsawang danced on his toes.

The script took yet another twist as Magramo found a second wind and stormed back in the ninth. In the 10th, the brave Thai retaliated, but Magramo ducked a straight left, stood up and claimed glory for himself and his nation. It began with eight straight right hands to the face of Pongsawang. It ended when the Thai crashed to the canvas, courageously tried to stand, then fell onto his back, prompting referee Bruce McTavish to wave it off.

As the crowd noise nearly tore the roof off the arena, hundreds mobbed the ring and paraded their hero on their shoulders. Magramo had his belt and his revenge. The Philippines had a title and redemption. All seemed right with the world and, considering the other circumstances in my life, I knew I didn't want to be anywhere else.

DON'T MISS

RING UPDATE WITH WILLIAM DETTLOFF

EVERY MONDAY ... EXCLUSIVELY ON: thering-online.com

Always insightful and often provocative, William Dettloff, *The Ring*'s senior writer, is the thinking-fans' columnist, a writer who never settles for the same old stale commentary you've already read a dozen times. For example, here's Dettloff's take on a handful of hot topics:

The dangers of boxing: "Long after you and I and everyone we know are long gone, men will still be fighting one another with their fists, and sometimes bad things will happen as a result. You may feel guilty about that fact if you wish. I will not."

Nicolay Valuev: "He's hairier than Robin Williams and facially looks an awful lot like Lurch from *The Addams Family*. In today's heavyweight division, that can get you a good long way."

The lack of a dominant heavyweight: "When a heavyweight champ is dominant, the only fun comes in wondering when someone will cut him down to size and how. We rush a guy to the top of the mountain just for the pleasure of watching him get knocked off."

Dettloff on thering-online.com ... The perfect way to answer the week's opening bell!

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MICKY WARD W 10 ARTURO GATTI

By Eric Raskin

I can't quite say that I knew how Arturo Gatti felt. But in the ninth round of his first fight with Micky Ward, my ribs were taking a pounding too.

Seated directly to my right along press row was Lou DiBella, the former HBO Sports executive who was in the early stages of his promotional career. I didn't realize it at the time, but he was in Ward's camp as an adviser, and as "Irish Micky" pounded Gatti for the majority of the most thrilling round I've ever sat ringside for, DiBella expressed his giddiness by repeatedly jabbing me in the midsection with his elbow.

It never occurred to me that Lou's euphoria owed to Ward turning the fight in his favor that round. It was simply the kind of round that made everyone—whether rooting for Ward, Gatti, or nobody in particular—intoxicated with admiration and disbelief. And if the ninth round was the high point, the rest of the fight wasn't that far behind. The whole 10 rounds these true warriors shared at Mohegan Sun Arena were a miracle of courage, desire, and nonstop action.

Not that anyone expected anything less. Over the previous five years or so, Gatti and Ward had been the two premier blood-and-guts gladiators in the sport (and had, as a result, become my two personal favorite fighters—yes, writers are allowed to have favorites too). The fact that their paths intersected so perfectly, with former 130-pound titlist Gatti re-emerging as a contender at 140 pounds just in time to catch the 36-year-old Ward before retirement called his name, was a gift from the boxing gods. Some observers thought Ward was already too far gone, picking Gatti to outbox him easily and propel Ward into a send-off fight in a minor league baseball stadium in his hometown of Lowell, Massachusetts. But to make that prediction was to miss the essence of both fighters: that Ward never makes it easy for anyone, and that Gatti almost always gives in to the lure of the crowd-pleasing brawl.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Ward and Gatti go to war

I made the drive to Connecticut certain that I was going to see a close fight and a spectacular battle. My expectations were as high as ever.

And yet they were significantly exceeded.

The crowd was not the largest I've ever been a part of—6,254 was the

Uncasville, Connecticut, May 18, 2002

announced attendance. But person-for-person, it was the loudest. With Mohegan Sun situated slightly closer to Ward's home turf than to Gatti's adopted home of Jersey City, the ovation for Ward was absolutely deafening, completely drowning out his introduction from ring announcer Mark Beiro. Meanwhile, Gatti's ring entrance and introduction were booed, which, as far as I know, was a first (and last) for him.

Gatti used his superior skills early, sweeping the first three rounds—though Ward kept the second and third close, and succeeded late in the third in turning the fight into exactly what he needed: a toe-to-toe slugfest. Ward's right hand carried the fourth and he crept a point closer when Gatti was penalized by referee Frank Cappuccino for a low blow. Then he erased what remained of the early deficit when he hurt Gatti badly with a blistering combination at the end of the fifth. The crowd was in such a frenzy, Cappuccino couldn't hear the bell signaling the end of the round. I could sense at the moment the transition from a "fun" fight to a "legendary" fight beginning to take place.

Gatti got back to boxing and inched ahead again in the sixth and seventh rounds, but the eighth saw a return to the sensational slugging the blood-thirsty masses craved, which of course meant it was a good round for Ward, who had Gatti in a fog and staggering for the final few seconds.

Then came the mind-blowing ninth. With Gatti still trying to recover from the eighth-round assault, Ward pounced, and his trademark left hook to the body made Gatti look like he wanted to throw up as he sunk to a knee. For the next 40 seconds or so, Ward hammered Gatti viciously, and the fight appeared to be seconds from ending. But Ward couldn't quite put the crazy-tough Gatti away, and somehow, by the middle of the round, Gatti was landing a succession of powershots on a punched-out Ward. The classic come-from-behind Gatti miracle appeared possible, but then the roles reversed again, and the gutsy Ward returned to dishing out a beating on an exhausted Gatti.

A great fight is always better live than on TV, and in this case, one of the fight's most unforgettable moments played out only for the live crowd, as HBO's cameras completely missed the drama occurring just outside the ropes. With 20 seconds to go in the round, and with Gatti taking an ungodly amount of punishment, his trainer, Buddy McGirt, climbed the ring steps, white towel in hand. He stood on the top step for just a moment, arm cocked, but Cappuccino never saw him, and when Gatti let a few retaliatory shots go, McGirt retreated back down the steps before Cappuccino—or any of the viewers at home—even knew how close the fight was to being over.

If it had been any other fighter besides Arturo Gatti, there wouldn't have been a 10th round. After all, according to CompuBox, Ward threw 82 powershots in the ninth, and landed a ridiculous *60* of them. But Gatti not only was allowed to see the final three minutes, he *won* them. In a career filled with superhuman efforts, the final round of this fight may have topped them all. But when the scorecards were totaled, it wasn't enough. In a fight that had ringside media divided (I had Ward up by a point), the New Englander captured a majority decision.

I still remember how crushed Gatti looked after the cards were read, standing in a corner of the ring, hanging his head, looking like he was thinking, *All that, for nothing*. Of course, it wasn't for nothing. And I'm not saying that because he went on a run of victories immediately after this fight, including two over Ward, which took his popularity to new heights. It's because this fight really wasn't about who won and who lost. Just being a part of this war was enough to dramatically elevate both fighters' legacies. It didn't matter who got the "W," just like it didn't matter that this was a mere 10-rounder without some trivial alphabet title at stake. The only letters you needed to describe Ward-Gatti were "FOTY," as in Fight of the Year.

The final piece of evidence of the fight's greatness came after it ended, after the press conference was over, after Gatti and Ward had both taken ambulance rides out of the building. The seats in the arena were all empty, the ring was being taken apart, and dozens of writers with long drives ahead of them were lingering about, not wanting to leave. We all wanted to just soak it in a little while longer.

As boxing fans, we suffer through too many dreary nights to easily let go of one as special as this.

DIEGO CORRALES KO 10 JOSE LUIS CASTILLO

Las Vegas, Nevada, May 7, 2005

By Tim Graham

For some reason, I remember the drool. A long, thick strand that fell from Diego Corrales' slackened mouth to his weary left wrist, where it hung like a bungee until yet another jolting punch sent it flying.

Yes, Jose Luis Castillo was punching the spit out of him.

At that moment, I was convinced Corrales was done. There was something cinematic about the moment that portended defeat.

I wasn't alone. Although they might not have noticed the slobber, the unfortunately sparse Cinco de Mayo weekend crowd of 5,168 frothing fans could sense impending doom. Corrales was absorbing substantial punishment. Castillo seemed to land every punch he threw. Throughout the night he unleashed a series of uppercuts that landed flush and often followed up with a punctuating left hook to the head.

Corrales practically was blind in his left eye, reduced to a purple slit from the swelling. A lump formed under his right eye. He said the bulges felt like "big, hard marbles." Corrales barely could see the torrent of punches, but everyone in attendance that magnificent night in Las Vegas at the Mandalay Bay Events Center could see them crush his defenseless head as if they were in slow motion.

But the scorecards were close. After nine relentless, seesaw rounds, I had Castillo ahead by only one point. The bout was so evenly matched, I didn't give either man more than two consecutive rounds. Later, I would learn two of the official judges had Corrales ahead, one by three points.

Corrales could have won the fight handily if he had a tactical bone in his 6-foot-tall body. He held a significant advantage over the 5'8" Castillo and commanded the fight whenever he used his size to pop him from a distance.

Alas, Corrales wasn't that kind of fighter. Not on this night. Not on any night. There was too much brawl in his system. So he repeatedly walked into an leather whipsaw, and his bloody and swollen face showed the signs.

Finally, 26 seconds into the 10th round of their lightweight championship bout, the inevitable came to pass. That devastating left uppercut detonated on Corrales' chin again. He dropped to one knee in the center of the ring and listed onto his side. He rolled over, his mouthpiece dislodged, his brain vibrating.

Corrales arose at the count of eight, but he wouldn't remain on his wobbly legs. Castillo delivered two left hooks that violently snapped Corrales' head.

Corrales went down in a heap. This time, he spat out his mouthpiece and batted it away. He got up at the count of nine. Referee Tony Weeks looked into his eyes and, convinced there was more fight left in him, allowed the fight to continue.

Before the bout resumed, however, Weeks called timeout and penalized Corrales one point for excessively removing his mouthpiece. He had a history of losing his mouthguard, a matter that caused grisly lip and gum lacerations in the past. He had lost it in the seventh round as well.

So Corrales, with more than half the round still to endure, was facing a 10-6 frame on the scorecards. If he escaped it. And even if he did make it back to his stool, the doctor might have stopped the bout because of the gruesome swelling around his eyes.

"It's not my job to worry about the swelling," Corrales said afterward. "It's not my job to worry about knockdowns. It's not my job to worry about anything that might hinder me. It's my corner's job to worry about those things. It's my job to fight."

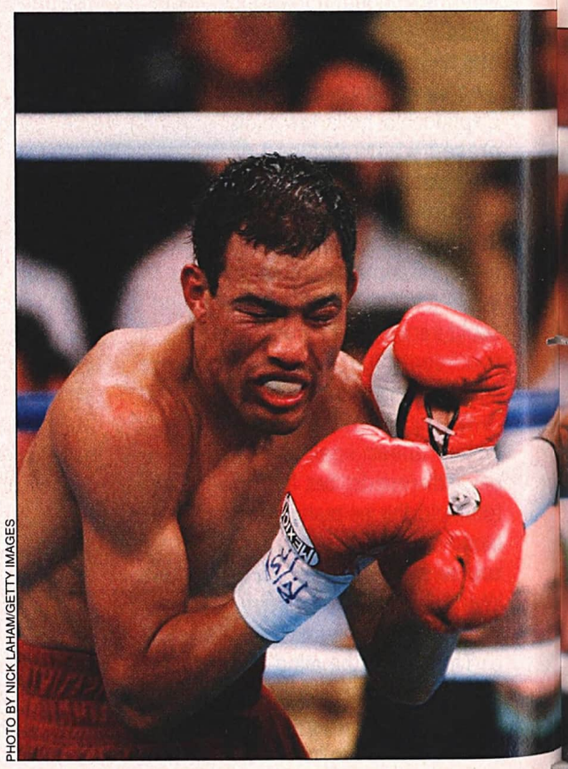

PHOTO BY NICK LAHAM/GETTY IMAGES

Corrales and Castillo create an epic for the ages

Suffice to say, there was plenty of concern in Corrales' corner.

"We were very worried in the corner," Corrales' trainer, Joe Goossen, said. "But I remember Diego telling me, 'If you ever stop one of my fights, I'll kill you.'"

As Goossen leisurely rinsed off the mouthpiece during the timeout, the tone of his voice sounded like that of a cross father. The words were said in part anger, part disappointment, all desperation.

"You gotta f___ing get inside on him now," Goossen warned.

Nobody on press row—a larger than normal gathering because the Boxing Writers Association of America had held its 81st annual Awards Dinner the evening before at Mandalay Bay—could have predicted what would happen next.

Corrales dug deep into a place few humans know. With 95 seconds left in the round, a dastardly right hook turned Castillo's head.

Was that merely a lucky punch?

Nine seconds later, a short left hook stunned Castillo.

Will Corrales actually survive this round?

Fury followed. Corrales, sensing his moment was now in his hands, unloaded his suddenly energized fists. He caught Castillo with a left hook and then a straight right.

I swear I could hear my own heart beating in my ears over the rising tumult of the crowd. The thump-thump within me increased while Corrales pounded away.

Right. Right-left-right.

A right to the temple.

A right to the jaw.

A left smack in the middle of Castillo's expressionless face.

Castillo sagged into the ropes. His eyes rolled back in his skull. His hands were barely at his waist. Castillo's biggest mistake was that his legs were too sturdy. He wouldn't crumple to the canvas, where an eight-second respite might have let him gather his scattered wits. Instead, Corrales teed off on his vulnerable opponent until Weeks was forced to rescue him.

"He was just naked, getting hit with bombs," Weeks said. "He went limp. He was unable to defend himself. He was out on his feet."

Now we were the ones left drooling. Euphoria engulfed the arena. The reporters looked at each other, mouths agape. There were 54 seconds remaining in a round so thoroughly dominated by the man who lost.

What just happened? Was that what I think it was?

The fight was over. Somehow, Corrales won.

The last time I experienced such astonishment amid a large group of journalists—those cynical, detached, and subjective observers trained not to get too passionate about anything more than making deadline and locating an attentive bartender afterward—was in the aftermath of Mike Tyson's cannibalistic rampage against Evander Holyfield.

On this night, though, we were stunned for all the right reasons.

"I, as an individual, never want to do this fight again," Corrales' promoter, Gary Shaw, said. "They stood in front of each other and were throwing big punches, and I don't want to see either of these guys get hurt."

Said Goossen: "You'd have to be sadistic to want to see that again."

Guilty as charged, and with my pulse still racing, I didn't feel a shred of shame for wanting to witness another go round between these two. There was no doubt such an epic clash in one of boxing's most storied divisions had to happen again.

Yet I already knew it would never match the spectacle that had just played out so brutally, so magnificently before me.

BARRERA-

Can A New Partnership

PHOTO COURTESY OF HBO

PACQUIAO II

Settle An Old Score?

By Don Stradley

No one involved with the upcoming rematch between Marco Antonio Barrera and Manny Pacquiao will admit it, but there's a sense that this fight, which would have been huge in 2004, is a bit of a throwaway in 2007. Granted, as far as throwaway fights go, this one comes with a ton of bells and whistles, and a hefty pay-per-view price. It'll probably pack Mandalay Bay too. But Barrera's best days are behind him. He's been talking retirement lately, which is a sign that he's already packing it in mentally. A warhorse like Barrera can't be dismissed entirely, but the fact that Pac-

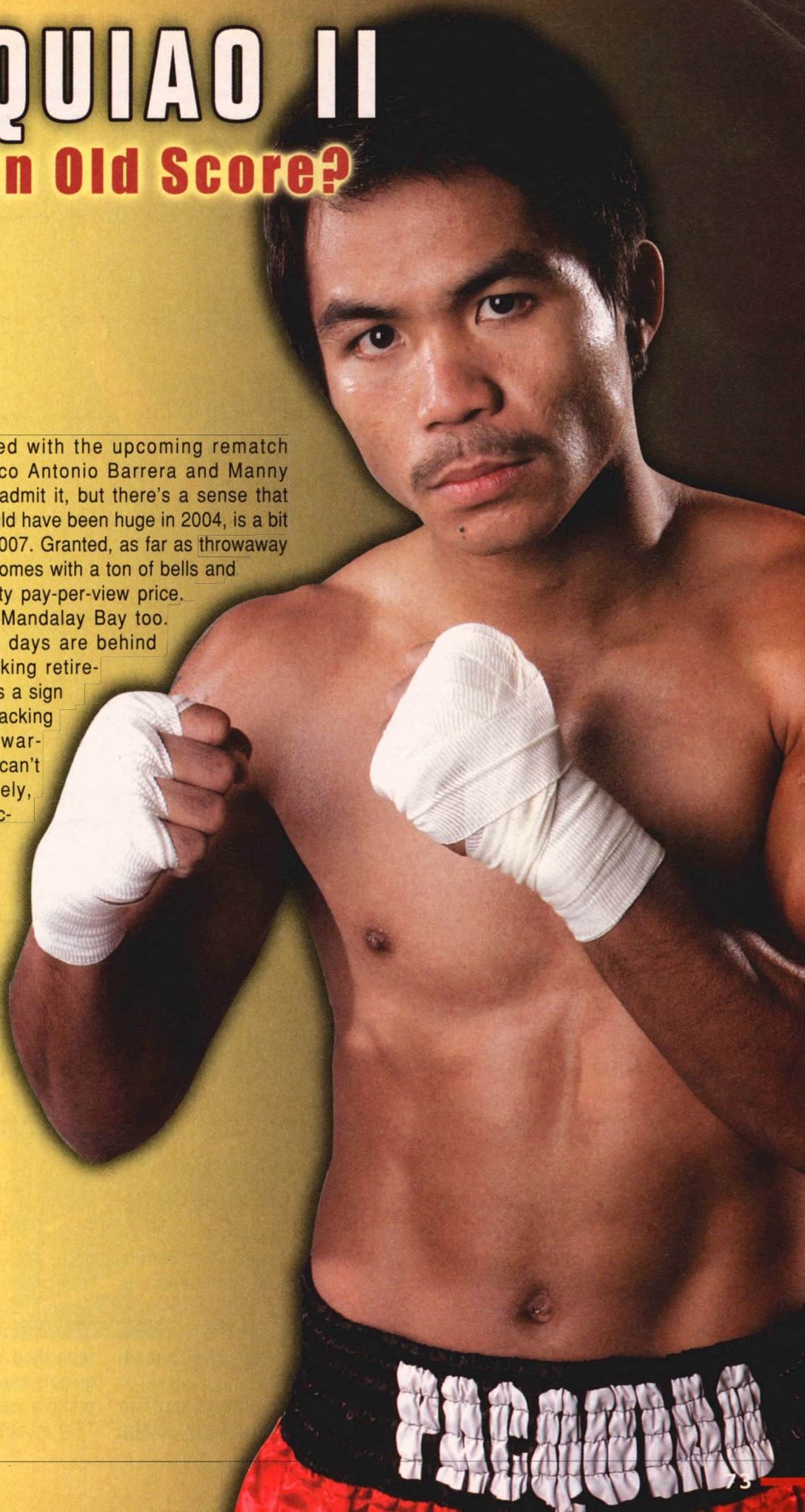

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA/TOP RANK

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Pacquiao and promoter Bob Arum at the annual Boxing Writers of America awards dinner in New York City, where Pac-Man had his face on the program cover and picked up the 2006 Fighter of the Year plaque. When Arum and Golden Boy Promotions settled their differences, the rematch between Pacquiao and Barrera quickly became their first co-promotion.

quiao ruined him four years ago at the Alamodome makes this rematch even more problematic for Barrera.

Much of the promotion will obviously involve the intrigue surrounding their first bout, when the public learned of a steel plate that had been placed in Barrera's head after a brain operation. If answering questions about his brain wasn't bad enough, Barrera also had to evacuate his training camp when a forest fire broke out nearby. So even though there are fresher opponents out there for Pacquiao, a rematch with Barrera is, as they say, a natural, with one very basic question to be answered: Is Pacquiao really Barrera's master or did Barrera simply have an off night back in 2003?

Golden Boy Promotions and Top Rank, the co-promoters of the rematch, believe the bout is a sure bet; fans will buy tickets and they will be entertained. But when we think about Barrera's recent performances, this fight seems less of a sure bet and more of a gamble. Even the folks at GBP have to be wondering if Barrera has enough left to make this event pay off.

It's not a great stretch of the imagination to envision the 33-year-old Barrera lasting four or five rounds before he takes a knee, just as fellow Mexican battler Jose Luis Castillo did recently against Ricky Hatton. It happens to the best of fighters. After a certain number of fights the car just won't run anymore, no matter how hard they mash down on the gas pedal. But even if Barrera stinks out Mandalay Bay in a rare moment of submission, there's a feeling that this fight was made strictly for business reasons. Granted, all fights are made for those reasons, but this one in particular really feels like a consolidation of properties.

Overshadowing the rematch has been the sudden warm and fuzzy relationship between Top Rank and Golden Boy Promotions. The rival groups put aside their differences regarding the rights to Manny Pacquiao's career to become co-promoters of a major Las Vegas fight.

"I'm absolutely relieved this is

PHOTOS BY WILL HART/HBO

Will it be déjà vu all over again? In their first encounter, Pacquiao's blistering attack to the head (above) and body (below) resulted in the most emphatic defeat of Barrera's illustrious career. Is there any reason to believe that the rematch will be different, especially after Barrera's loss to Juan Manuel Marquez?

behind us and that we will work together to make some great fights," Top Rank promoter Bob Arum told ESPN.com. "I think it's tremendous for boxing." Richard Schaefer, CEO of Golden Boy, was in harmony with Arum. "Boxing is the big winner," Schaefer said. "It's an important day for boxing when you have two of the biggest promotional companies settling their differences and moving on to do things together. We can bring fans great fights. Top Rank and Golden Boy working together is great news for the sport."

The settlement terms dictate that bouts between Pacquiao and Golden Boy fighters will be co-promoted by the companies. If Pacquiao fights someone outside of Golden Boy's group of fighters, Top Rank will promote the fight, with Golden Boy "retaining a promotional interest."

The structure of the settlement, brokered by attorney Daniel Weinstein, was so agreeable to the parties involved that Arum and Schaefer made the Pacquiao-Barrera rematch over lunch in Las Vegas.

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"The big picture is that it will enable so many fights to be made quite easily because Schaefer and I are both business people," said Arum. "We're not going to waste time on petty issues like a lot of promoters. We made Pacquiao-Barrera at lunch in 10 minutes."

We imagine the conversation went something like this:

Bob Arum: How about Manny versus Barrera? We should get that one out of the way first. If we wait too long, Barrera retires and there goes a few million bucks we'll never see. And so what if Pacquiao kicks the crap out of him? Barrera will get more money being knocked out by Pacquiao than he will for another bout with Juan Manual Marquez.

Richard Schaefer: Good point. Is Marquez one of your guys?

BA: No, he's yours, but he can't draw flies with a handful of poop. So what sounds better, Barrera-Marquez II in a half empty arena, or Barrera-Pacquiao II in a arena bursting with Mexicans and Filipinos?

RS: I'd prefer De La Hoya-Mayweather II, but for now we'll do Barrera-Pacquiao II.

BA: Great. Let's eat.

Okay, so maybe it wasn't like that. In fact, Schaefer informed THE RING via e-mail, "After the Marquez fight, Barrera took a couple months off to reflect on what he wanted to do. Initially, he was thinking about an easy fight from Mexico, but then changed his mind and asked us to pursue the rematch with Pacquiao. I do not think that his decision has anything to do with retirement, nor was the fight suggested by Arum or Golden Boy. We told Marco that we are behind him 100 percent and respect whatever decision he takes relating to the opponent for his next fight."

Marquez is the odd man out, already booked to fight Jorge Barrios while Pacquiao and Barrera settle in for a big money bout. But Marquez has become the Mexican Winky Wright. He's skillful and he can scrap when he needs to, but he's not a ticket seller. If he wins convincingly against Barrios, and it's hard to think he won't, Marquez will probably get the winner of Pacquiao-Barrera II.

For those keeping up with THE RING's championship policy, Pacquiao-Barrera II will not fill the current vacancy at the top of the 130-pound weight class. THE RING, in some cases, would recognize as the new champion the winner of a bout between first- and third-ranked contenders, which Pacquiao and Barrera respectively happen to be. But in this particular case, number-two contender Marquez has a win over Barrera and a draw with Pacquiao. Should Marquez get the winner of Barrera-Pacquiao II, that bout will certainly be for THE RING's junior lightweight championship. And while Pacquiao will no doubt be the betting favorite to beat Barrera, not everyone is certain it'll be an easy night for Pac-Man.

"Barrera's durable," said Pacquiao's trainer, Freddie Roach, during an Internet interview. "He's a tough guy and you can't take anybody too lightly in this game." In a second interview, with the *Manila Bulletin*, Roach added, "A lot of people are saying that this is going to be an easy fight, but Manny must be in shape to win. Marco will try to make the fight a slow-paced one, and for Manny to win, he must make Marco work every second of the fight. Barrera is going to come out fighting, because there's a lot of pride at stake in this fight. He said this is going to be his last, so I expect him to be at his best."

There's a flicker of a possibility that Barrera, 63-5 (42), will dig in and make it interesting, but a more likely scenario is that Barrera will fight well for a few rounds before realizing that Pacquiao is actually stronger and better than he was in 2003. Barrera will either capitulate after taking a few of those "Manila Ice" right hooks to the body or he'll hang on and lose a decision.

"I'm sure Barrera would love to go out a winner, but I believe we will get to him late," said Roach.

Of course, Pacquiao, 44-3-2 (35), could be due for a bad night, which bodes well for Barrera. Then again,

PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

It is widely believed that Barrera is slipping, but although he lost his most recent fight, to Marquez, Barrera kept it close and felt he should have gotten the nod. Barrera was especially effective with his right hand, which is frequently an effective weapon against southpaws like Pacquiao.

Pacquiao's bad night may have taken place against Jorge Solis last April, when Pacquiao looked unsteady for several rounds before flattening Solis in the eighth.

Pacquiao's always-hectic personal life could have been a factor against Solis. Pacquiao could've been distracted by his candidacy in an upcoming Filipino election. He was also coming off an important three-round knockout of Erik Morales, and

Although both Pacquiao and Barrera went 2-1 in trilogies with Erik Morales, the Filipino slugger twice stopped Morales, while both of Barrera's victories were via close decision. Of course, Barrera faced a younger, fresher version of Morales, which might have skewed the comparison.

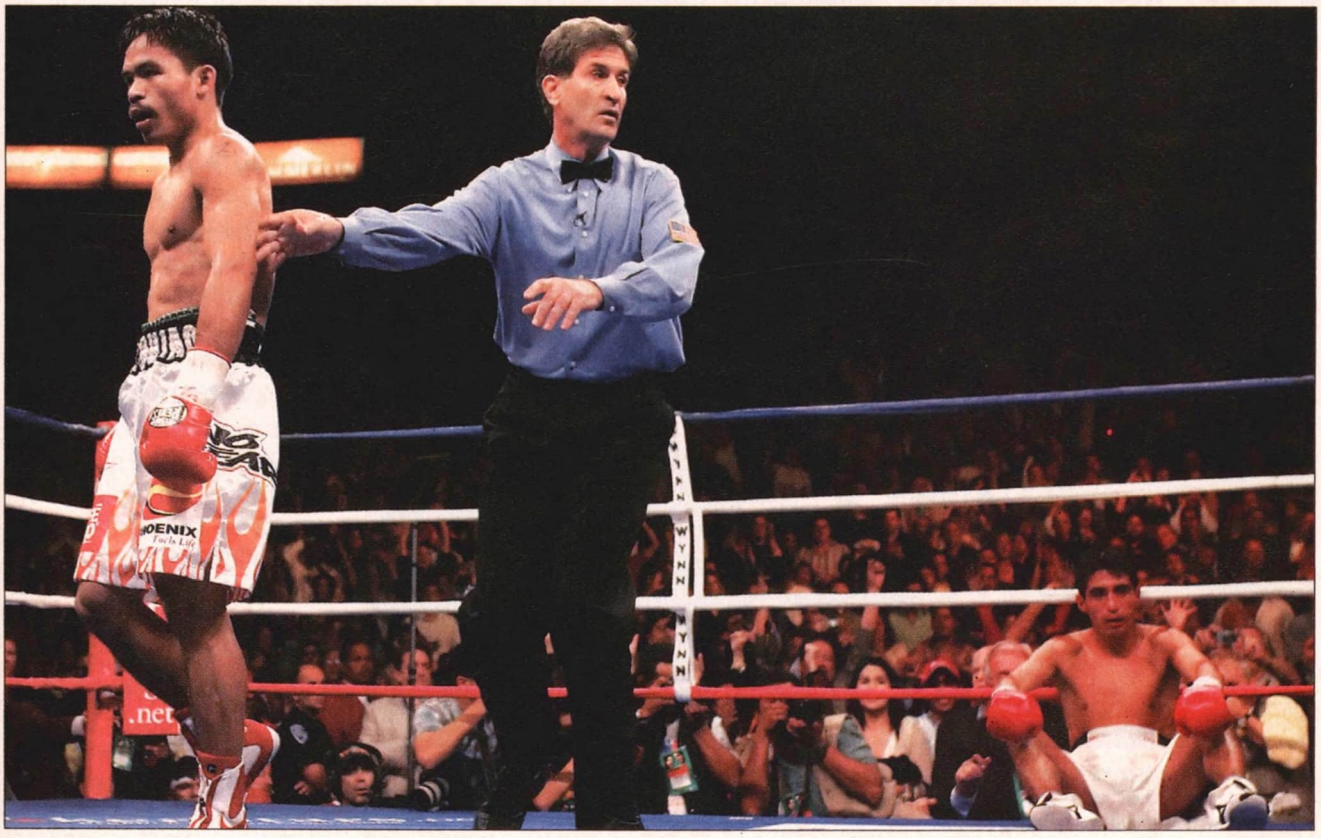

PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

In his most recent victory, a September 2006 decision over Rocky Juarez, Barrera used his boxing skills more than his punching power. It is unlikely, however, that the aging Mexican icon has the speed and legs to successfully use the same strategy against the younger, quicker Pacquiao.

it's difficult to be brilliant in back-to-back fights. So with the election out of the way—Manny wasn't elected, which could mean he's not as popular as he thought or else Filipino voters are smarter than we thought—Pacquiao has returned to form, visiting Las Vegas recently to take part in a poker tournament. Without a government seat on his mind, Pacquiao can relax and get back to what he does best—trampling opponents. If that's the case, Barrera should be back in his hotel and showered in time to watch *Saturday Night Live*.

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA/TOP RANK

One thing that might work in Barrera's favor is the many distractions that always seem to surround Pacquiao. He is besieged by fans wherever he goes, recently ran for public office in the Philippines, and also spends a lot of time shooting pool and playing cards.

Barrera's last bout, a unanimous decision loss to Marquez, showed Barrera as he is now: still valiant, still intelligent, but fighting only in spurts. He did his best stuff near the end of rounds, using the old man's trick of trying to steal a stanza with a late flurry. Although a spurt from Barrera is enough to beat most junior lightweights, it's not enough to beat the elite. Barrera's hand speed is down and so is the old ferocity factor. In recent years he's turned himself into a boxer, but his legs won't get him out of jams anymore, so he's drawn into mid-ring exchanges that are

becoming harder with age. That's why a heavy-handed plodder like Rocky Juarez was able to give Barrera such a hard fight in 2006. In their rematch, Barrera fought cautiously, which bored the customers but won the fight. He doesn't have the wheels to do the same to Pacquiao.

Still, other great ones have pulled out miracle performances when they seemed to be done. Willie Pep was written off after losing the featherweight championship to Sandy Saddler, but he came back to win a 15-round decision over Saddler. Tommy Hearns was thought to be done, but when he met his former conqueror, Sugar Ray Leonard, in a long awaited return bout, he decked Leonard twice on his way to a controversial draw. If Barrera can do something similar, and if Pacquiao has a bad night, the maiden voyage of this open marriage involving Top Rank, Golden Boy, and Pacquiao, may be memorable after all.

There are many fights in store for Top Rank and Golden Boy. There have already been whispers of an encounter between Top Rank's Miguel Cotto and "The Golden Boy" himself, Oscar De La Hoya. It's no mere coincidence that Arum and De La Hoya put down their weapons shortly after 20,684 people filled Madison Square Garden to see Cotto fight Zab Judah. The aging De La Hoya probably views Cotto, a popular Puerto Rican fighter who is neither fast nor difficult to hit, as a perfect opponent. But in order to make that one happen, the two companies had to get a few things off the table, just to see how the alliance would work. Boxing, after all, is a business, and for GBP and Top Rank, Pacquiao-Barrera II is just that. For Barrera, this fight is about old business that needs to be addressed; for Pacquiao, who will probably win by knockout, it is just business as usual. ■

Don Stradley is a freelance writer from Massachusetts and a regular contributor to THE RING.

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PHOTO BY AL BELLO GETTY IMAGES

HE'S SPILLED HIS LAST DROP

Now It's Time For Gatti To Say Goodbye

By William Dettloff

"Gatti ... Gatti ... Gatti ..."

You couldn't tell it was over from the way they still chanted his name, even near the end, when all clearly was lost. If you closed your eyes, it could have been the Wilson Rodriguez fight in the Garden again, or Gabriel Ruelas right here in Atlantic City, or either of the

wars with Ivan Robinson. But it wasn't. Those were years ago, so many years and punches ago and pints of blood and broken hands and swollen eyes ago. It was now, and Alfonso Gomez was punching him all over the ring, so easily it would almost have been comical if it weren't so painful to watch and almost certainly permanently damaging.

Gomez' hit their man with about every punch with which one can hit another, and you got the sense watching it that if someone invented a new punch and whispered it into Gomez' ear between rounds, he'd have started landing that one too. That's how easy it was. But every once in a while when their man wound up a hook or right hand and cracked it home, like he'd always done before, it gave them hope and they chanted again: "Gatti ... Gatti ... Gatti ..."

So you wouldn't have known it from the chant, but you had to think some portion of the 9,438 fans who drove out to the Atlantic City boardwalk (or went "down the shore," in Jersey parlance) must have been realists. There still are some of those left in the world, right? Some had to know, or suspected at least, that it would be the last time they would make the drive to their beloved Boardwalk Hall for an Arturo Gatti fight. It would be the last time one of their buddies at a July softball game would ask, "What are you doing next weekend?" and the reply would be: "We'll be down the shore; Gatti's fightin.'" Not "Arturo Gatti" and a long explanation of who that is. Just "Gatti."

True, it already was a done deal that so long as he beat Gomez, he'd fight Julio Cesar Chavez' kid, and after that, who knew what could happen? It's ironic that it was Chavez' old man who brought back the farewell tour, and if he was able to make a few bucks doing it, why couldn't Gatti, for just a couple fights?

You could just see it: Gatti beats Gomez, because, well, let's be serious, Gomez is a guy from *The Contender* TV show, and when those guys step up, they lose *(see sidebar)*. Certainly Gatti had enough left to qualify as a step up for a guy who'd recently been a little lucky to get a draw with Jesse Feliciano, right? We mean, how shot could he be? So Gatti would beat Gomez, then slap around Chavez' kid because he wasn't his old man, never could be, and Gatti couldn't lose to some snot nose like him. No way.

That was the optimists' view, and you could make a case for it: Big deal that Gatti had lost, resoundingly, to Floyd Mayweather and then Carlos Baldomir (which sandwiched a win over Thomas Damgaard). Where was the shame in that? Zab Judah had done the exact same thing (except for the win over Damgaard, and in reverse order) and no one was telling Judah he was shot. So to the optimist, there still was the chance that Gatti would be around for a little while longer and maybe even had one more Fight of the Year left in him.

In case you haven't noticed, optimists are disappointed a lot of the time. It comes with the territory. They were again when Gatti, the wonderful, bloody dream of a prizefighter he had been for the better part of a decade found he no longer could wade through punches to batter a man who just seconds earlier had appeared his master—even a lower-rung one like Gomez. If it wasn't a surprise to the pessimists among us, it was to his trainer, Micky Ward, who in better days famously engaged Gatti in a bloody trilogy that ranks among the best in the game's history.

"There was no indication before the fight, in the gym, that anything was wrong," Ward told THE RING. "He had the

Gatti was never in the fight, as Gomez battered him from the very start with clean, flush punches. The popular slugger has taken a lot of beatings during his roller-coaster career, but hopefully, this was the last. Even though Gatti has made millions of dollars, you can't help but wonder if it will compensate for the damage done to his body.

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Gatti was so shot, he made Gomez look like a potential Hall of Famer. The popular Contender graduate landed every punch in his arsenal virtually at will, handing out a horrific beating.

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIREIMAGES

THIS CONTENDER IS A WINNER!

It wasn't bad enough that Alfonso Gomez was fighting on what Arturo Gatti fans would consider hallowed ground in Atlantic City. He also had the added pressure of being the latest *Contender* star to step up onto a big stage and try not to flop.

Before Gomez' big win in New Jersey, Cornelius Bundrage was knocked out by Joel Julio, Andre Berto blew out Norberto Bravo, and Sechew Powell beat Ishe Smith. Season One finalist Peter Manfredo, Gomez' nemesis, didn't get out of the first round against Joe Calzaghe in a super middleweight world championship fight. But at least those guys tried. Season One champion Sergio Mora passed on a fight with world middleweight champion Jermain Taylor, reportedly because he didn't like the venue.

Gomez, 17-3-2 (8), made the most of his chance, pounding Gatti from the outset with stiff, straight jabs and jarring right crosses. He seemed miles better than the fighter who drew with Feliciano in Las Vegas in May 2006. Many gave credit afterward to veteran trainer Pepe Correa, who worked alongside with Gomez' father, Alfonso Sr., just for the Gatti fight. Not everyone thought Correa was the difference.

"I give Gomez all the credit in the world. He's a good, humble, nice kid and he fought a great fight," said Micky Ward, who was Gatti's trainer. "He's a good little fighter and I wish him all the best. I take nothing away from him. But Arturo wasn't right from the get-go."

Whatever the case, it's a testament to Gomez' shy charm and warm personality that he wasn't run out of Boardwalk Hall under a hail of bottles and metal folding chairs. While he was booed heartily when introduced before the fight, by the end there was the sense that if Gatti had to go out, it made it easier that it was against someone like Gomez, who is by far the most popular fighter to have come out of the *Contender* series. He told the press afterward that he would love to take Gatti's spot against Julio Cesar Chavez Jr., if it could be made. We're doubtful Top Rank would want to risk a potential cash cow like Chavez against Gomez at this point, but we'd like to see it as well.

—W.D.

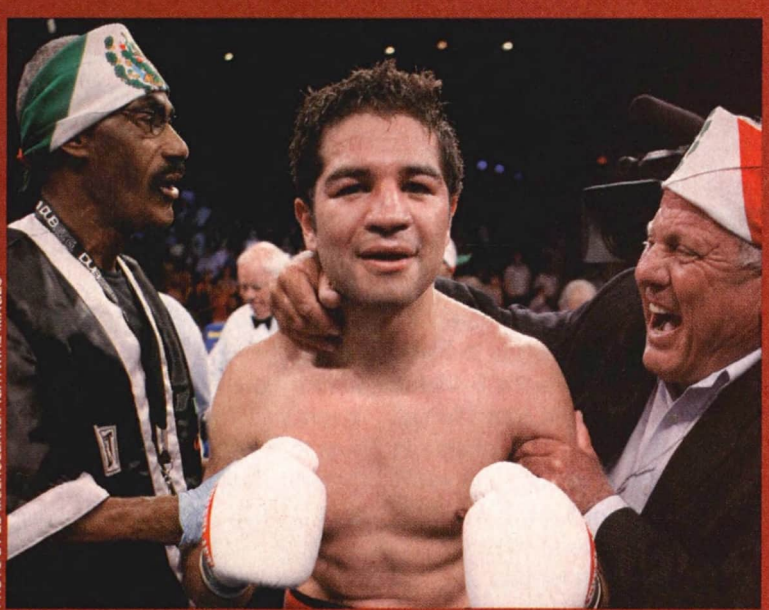


PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Gomez successfully shed the negative Contender *image*

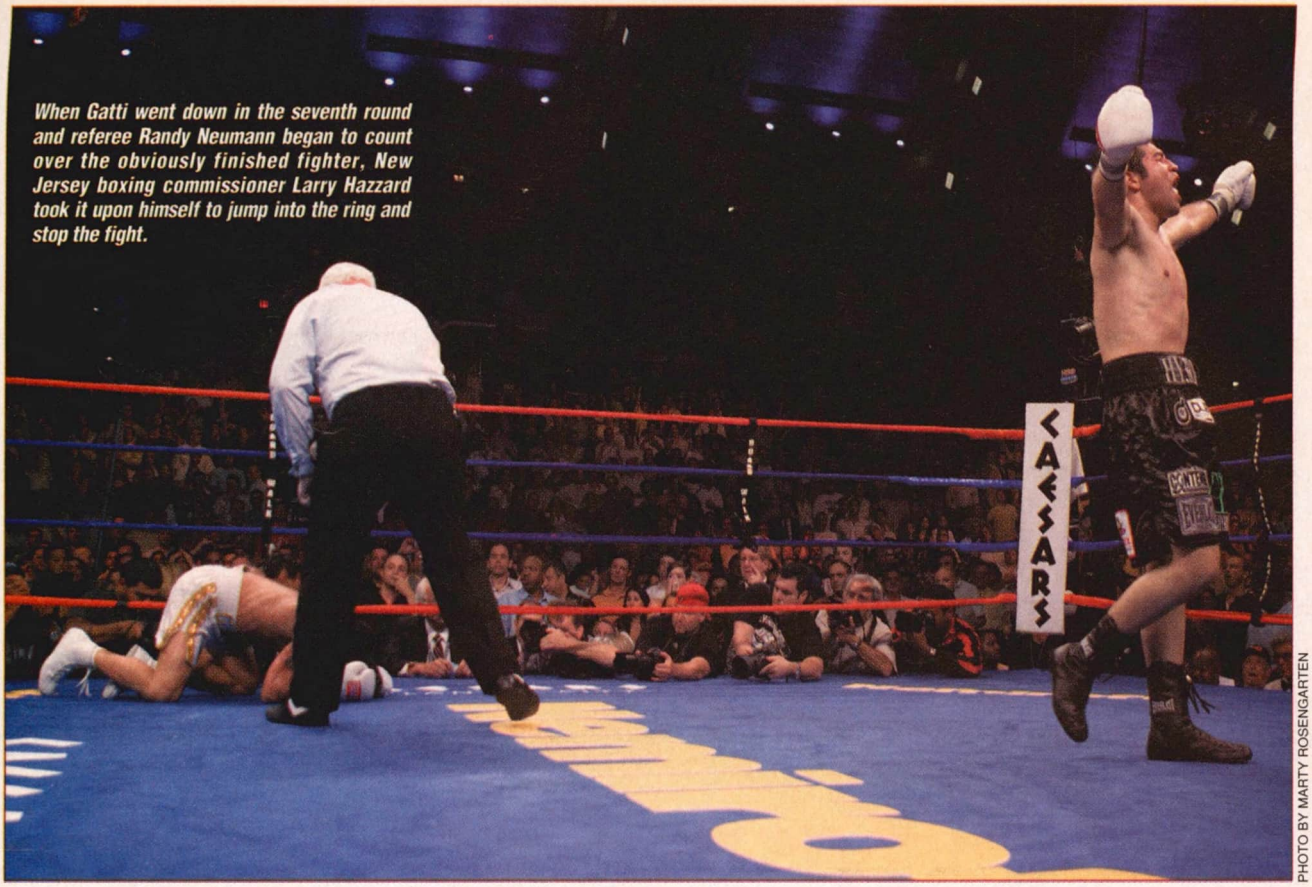
legs, his speed was still there. He looked great in the gym. But when he got up in the ring, he just didn't have it. He wasn't right from the start. That's what happens sometimes, it just all catches up to you one night, and I guess that was the night for him. All those wars just caught up to him. It was just time."

Ward caught criticism in some corners, perhaps deservedly, for not stopping the bout as Gatti reeled around the ring in the seventh round, getting battered. But Ward was a blood-and-guts fighter too, as stubborn and resilient in the ring as Gatti always had been. Small wonder he couldn't convince himself to pull the plug. Guys like he and Gatti and a few others live by an entirely different code, and don't bother trying to understand it. You can't.

"I thought about it," he said. "A couple of times I was close. But every time I thought about it, he'd land a wicked left hook, and I'd think, *He still has a puncher's chance*. You don't want anybody to get hurt bad, but I thought, if it was me in there I wouldn't have wanted my corner to stop it. I wouldn't have wanted that."

Neither, apparently, did referee Randy Neumann, who stood by slack-jawed as Gatti took a tremendous hammering throughout, but particularly in the seventh. Oblivious to both the damage Gatti was absorbing and to the cries of a few bleeding hearts in press row who pleaded with him to stop it, Neumann even started to count over Gatti after a final right hand bent his upper body backward over the top rope and then dumped him on the canvas. A week after the fight, New Jersey boxing commissioner Larry Hazzard had no regrets about overruling Neumann, as he did when he leapt into the ring to stop it himself at the 2:12 mark.

"I'm not in the habit of criticizing referees, referees that I appoint myself," he told THE RING. "In that seventh round, Gatti had taken, by my count, 20 unanswered punches and gave great credence to the expression 'beaten from pillar to post.' When he took that final right hand and went to the canvas, that fight should have been stopped right then and there. He had not landed a telling punch for six rounds. One more punch might have been the end of Arturo Gatti,



When Gatti went down in the seventh round and referee Randy Neumann began to count over the obviously finished fighter, New Jersey boxing commissioner Larry Hazzard took it upon himself to jump into the ring and stop the fight.

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

and I was not going to let that happen. Randy Neumann and I were not on the same page mentally."

So it was over just like that for Gatti, and don't get the wrong idea: There's nothing special or unusual about a 35-year-old pug getting his head handed to him by a younger, stronger, more skilled guy. That's been going on for as long as guys have been putting on gloves and giving one another brain damage. It's part of the game and a necessary one at that.

Besides that, no one should be crying for Gatti. He made a hell of a lot of money in this business ($1.7-million for Gomez) and experienced things in his life, in the ring and out, that those smart-ass suits with their capped teeth and smooth eyebrows and pinkie rings could only dream about. Has he accepted a big mortgage for those moments and for the big paychecks that came with them? Damn right he has. We don't know how painful the payments on that mortgage will be to make or whether they'll come due in 10 years or 30 or in five. They'll come due eventually; they always do, for fighters and for us. And whenever they come, only Gatti will be able to say whether or not the price he paid for what he got was fair. Only he will know if he got a good deal, if he made the right choices.

It's important, too, that we not confuse Gatti's in-ring persona with his real one either, the way many confused those of Diego Corrales in the days and weeks after his death. Gatti, 40-9 (31), is no angel outside the ring, and, to be clear, never was a great fighter in it. Even the Atlantic City regulars, if they're honest and know what they're talking about, will tell you that. Maybe in a different era, when a lot of guys could fight like Floyd Mayweather or Oscar De La Hoya and also had to weigh in on the day of the fight, maybe he wouldn't have done as well as he did.

But it never was about how good Gatti was in the ring. It was about how resilient he was, how he didn't give up, how he could turn it around in a microsecond, and, most of all, how much of himself he was willing to mortgage for the win. Ward, slow-footed and unimaginative in the ring, made Gatti look like a damn talented fighter in their second and third fights, and lesser guys sometimes made him look like more than he was. He never was great. But it didn't matter. That's not what it was about.

Gatti said afterward that he's retiring for good, blamed it on the odd happenstance that he's too big for junior welterweight and too small for welter. That means that he might be the only fighter in history that would need, in order to continue fighting successfully, his own weight class somewhere between 141 and 146 pounds. It's nonsense, of course, and even if he believes it now, the day will come when he will see it for what it is. That day always comes.

Should Gatti decide at some point to come back, as fighters so often do, he would not find the road welcoming. "Arturo Gatti would be hard-pressed to box in New Jersey again," Hazzard said. "He has a right to engage all of the legal processes at his disposal; I couldn't just say 'he can never fight here again.' But the feeling is we concur with his retirement and we would not like to see him fight again—anywhere. I've seen enough to know that the Gatti era is over."

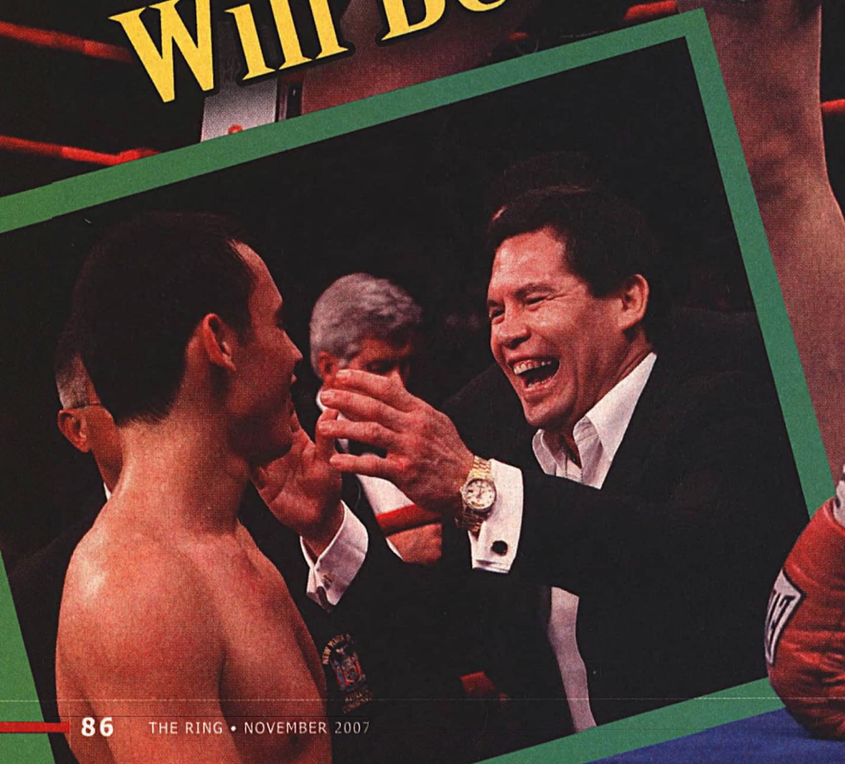
All of us have. We have all awakened, regrettably, from the wonderful, bloody dream that was Arturo Gatti. ■

A NEW CHAVEZ FOR A NEW GENERATION

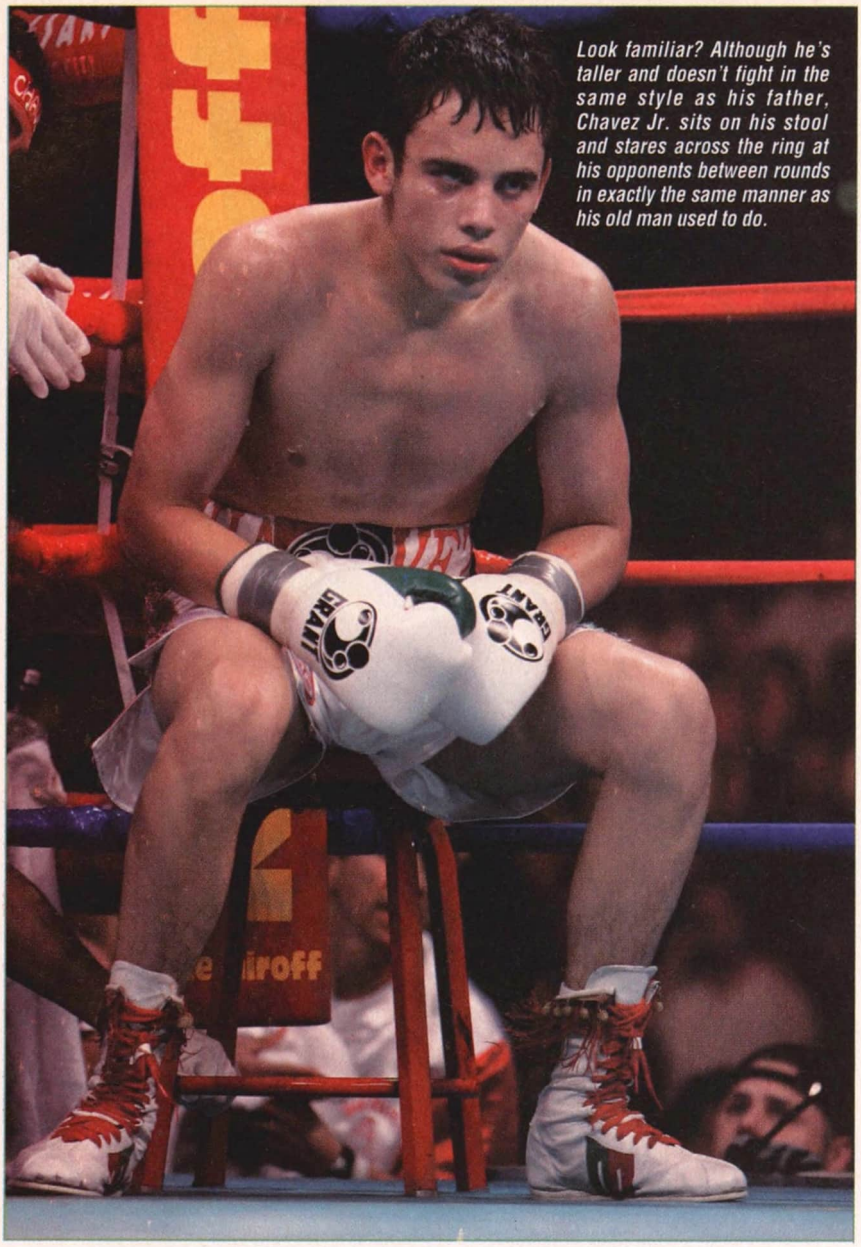
By Don Stradley
PHOTOS BY NICK LAHAM/GETTY IMAGES

The scene happens more often now: A middle-aged Mexican man sits in the audience of a Top Rank boxing show with a child next to him. The man points to a short, broad-shouldered gentleman standing

"The Father Was Mine; The Son Will Be Yours"



Chavez Jr. tallied his 32nd professional win by knocking out Grover Wiley (left) on the undercard of the Miguel Cotto-Zab Judah card at Madison Square Garden. The victory was especially sweet because Wiley had beaten his father, who looks particularly happy as he rushes to embrace his son afterward (opposite page).



Look familiar? Although he's taller and doesn't fight in the same style as his father, Chavez Jr. sits on his stool and stares across the ring at his opponents between rounds in exactly the same manner as his old man used to do.

at the edge of the ring and says, *Look, it is Chavez, el Gran Campeón Mexicano.* The child looks at Julio Cesar Chavez, maybe recognizing him from old VCR tapes. Then, the middle-aged man points to another figure, a youngster wearing a colorful robe that shimmers under the harsh arena lights. This is Julio Cesar Chavez Jr., the son of Chavez.

"I see it all the time," said Top Rank publicist Lee Samuels. "The father points to Chavez Jr. and says, 'The father was mine; the son will be yours.' It's a very touching thing to see."

It wasn't always this way. When Chavez Jr. turned pro four years ago, he was a delicate 130-pound boy stretched across a 5'11" frame. He looked unsure of himself. Since then he's grown into a large welterweight and routinely knocks men to their knees; it feels safe to talk about him now.

Look, the Mexican men say. *The father was mine; the son will be yours.*

The children watch the thin young man in the flashy robe. They have no idea how important he really is.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Many famous fighters have had children follow them into the sport. Bob Fitzsimmons and Billy Papke had sons who were good enough to become journeymen; Hector Camacho Jr. got off to a good start before he fizzled; Joe Frazier's son, Marvis, did pretty well, but is usually remembered for his losses to Larry Holmes and Mike Tyson.

Where Chavez Jr. differs from most in his situation is that his father was more than a famous fighter; he was the virtual patron saint of his country. "He transcended the sport," Bob Arum said in a newspaper interview last year. "He became the first big international sports star from Mexico. They'd had other great fighters, but nobody like Julio Cesar Chavez, nobody they really embraced. He was the man that typified the Mexicans' courage and persistence, and he did it in a way that made them all laugh, because he is such a character."

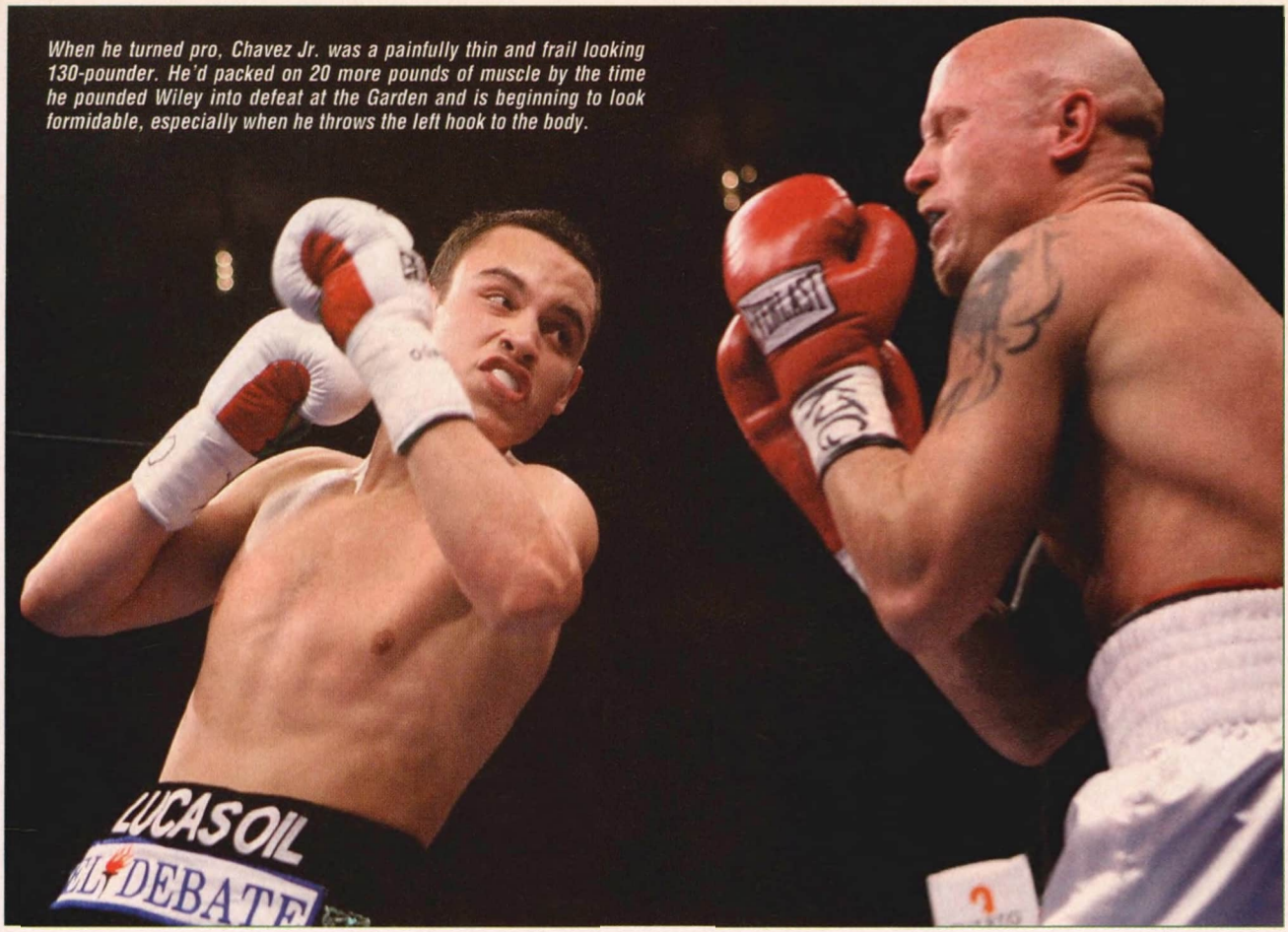
It's a strange kind of fame; Chavez is still mobbed in airports, and can draw as many as 2,500 people for a simple personal appearance. Local revelers once shot his Sinaloa home full of holes, so excited were they at seeing where the champ lived. Diego Luna, who directed a new documentary called *Chavez*, explained to nervepop.com the significance of Mexico's favorite fighter.

"It was the only good news we were getting," Luna said of Chavez' winning streak. "I never saw him lose, for 14 years almost. That's unbelievable. My country was so polarized, and Julio was the guy who united the country. Rich and poor, left and right, everyone was cheering for him." And Chavez Jr. has added a new layer to the Chavez saga. "It makes him seem like a normal guy," said Luna. But having that famous last name, according to Arum, is not a burden for Chavez Jr.

"I think it's good for him," Arum told THE RING. "It's going to make him so big among the Mexican people. They want him to succeed."

In Madison Square Garden last June, Chavez Jr. was matched with journeyman Grover Wiley on the undercard of Miguel Cotto's bout with Zab Judah. Wiley was just another in a long list of pushovers, but this time there was a twist: Wiley had once beaten his father. In that bout, held two years ago in Phoenix, Arizona, the elder Chavez quit on his stool with a broken hand and finally, at 42, retired from the sport. Arum knew Chavez Jr. would someday fight Wiley.

With no amateur background, Chavez Jr., 32-0-1 (25), is building his record the



When he turned pro, Chavez Jr. was a painfully thin and frail looking 130-pounder. He'd packed on 20 more pounds of muscle by the time he pounded Wiley into defeat at the Garden and is beginning to look formidable, especially when he throws the left hook to the body.

way his father did. He's been criticized for not stepping up the competition, but his father beat a worse collection of opponents at the beginning of his own epic career. In fact, Chavez was 44-0 before he fought Mario Martinez for a vacant alphabet belt in 1984, and there hadn't been a real fighter among those 44 wins. The difference is that Chavez learned his craft in dusty little arenas in Culiacan and Tijuana, without being scrutinized. Chavez Jr., because of his well-known father, has had to serve his apprenticeship in full view of the public. Current fans, and even certain members of the press, don't quite understand the process. They're impatient, wondering why the kid hasn't been matched with better opponents. But inch-by-inch, Chavez Jr. is improving.

"He's ahead of where we thought he'd be by this time," said Arum. "When he came to us he was the novice of all novices. He had a little leg up because he'd been around his father, but he really had to learn everything from scratch."

Wisely, Chavez does not work his son's corner. An uncle, Rodolfo Chavez, helms that role. "I know what boxing is all about," said Chavez, who once attracted 132,000 people to watch him fight Greg Haugen at Aztec Stadium. "I don't like to watch my son go through it." On top of that, as Chavez Jr. began his career, Chavez was dealing with personal problems.

"Julio was rapidly going downhill," said Arum. "While he was fighting, he was drunk half the time toward the end." In September 2004, Chavez embarrassed himself by appearing at an Arizona news conference an hour late, drunk and silly. Some have pointed to that disastrous afternoon as the incident that caused Chavez to change. The turnaround was major.

"I didn't want to set a bad example for him," Chavez told *The San Diego Union Tribune*. "I didn't want him to see the way I lived."

There's a feeling within Top Rank's inner circle that Chavez' problems went deeper than he will acknowledge. Mexican promoter and longtime Chavez adviser Fernando Beltran told the *Arizona Daily Star*, "It's no secret he was drinking so much that he was going to die if he continued."

Chavez once admitted on Mexican television that going through a divorce, a child-custody battle, and charges of tax evasion, had filled his mind with dark thoughts. "He was not living the way he should have," Beltran told *The Arizona Republic*. "What the son has brought to his dad, I think, is really this: He has saved his life."

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

In New York, the father sits by quietly and watches his son dismantle Wiley. Another son, Omar, who will turn pro within a year, fidgets around, unable to keep his seat. Chavez used to hate watching his son fight; now, as Chavez Jr. walks Wiley down, the elder Chavez seems relaxed. Chavez Jr. is like a kid who has mastered a particular computer game; it's all becoming too easy for him.

Chavez Jr. has perfected the left hook to the body, and for most of three rounds he buries the punch into Wiley's side. At one point, Wiley, 30-10-1 (14), falls to the canvas, cursing loudly enough to be

Even though he's gradually stepping it up, Chavez Jr.'s level of competition had been dismal until fairly recently. But a big part of that is because he didn't have an amateur career and is basically learning his trade on the job. Regardless of who's in the other corner, however, Mexican and Mexican-American fans can't get enough of the son of Chavez.

heard in the press row. Wiley curses because he cannot avoid the left hook. It's a gunshot of a punch, and when Wiley rises, he gets blasted in the ribs again. The fight ends at 2:27 of the third round, with Wiley on the canvas, writhing.

When he was asked how it felt to beat the man who'd beaten his father, Chavez Jr. said through a translator, "Very happy. I'm going to celebrate for a long time." He was giddy, barely able to control his nervous laughter. At times, he seems much younger than his 21 years, but he's not dumb. He knows why he was booed in 2006 when he struggled to a draw with an unheralded fighter named "King" Carlos Molina. He knows the expectations that come with his name would be daunting for most. Laila Ali may have received the same amount of attention, but not the same expectations. The limited number of opponents for Laila meant she was destined for red carpet events, not ring wars. Roberto Duran had children who fought professionally, but they weren't committed and never had the right backing. No, the only fighter who might understand what Chavez Jr. is going through was the son of a French fighter who boxed decades ago.

Marcel Cerdan had been the idol of France, the hero the country needed after its national pride had been damaged during World War II. A romantic and tragic figure, Cerdan had a well-publicized affair with France's top songbird, Edith Piaf. After Cerdan was killed in a plane crash, the country mourned as if a president had been killed. At Cerdan's funeral, the flowers alone required a fleet of 48 taxis. Among those left behind was a sickly son, Marcel Jr.

"Never was a boy less equipped physically to become a fighter," said his uncle Emil. But Cerdan Jr. was obsessed with his father's legacy. Among Cerdan Jr.'s keepsakes were the trunks Cerdan wore when he won the middleweight championship in 1948, still spattered with Tony Zale's blood. At 15, Cerdan Jr. began boxing professionally. "It is my duty to try to succeed my father," he told *Time*. In 1970, with plenty of hype and mystery surrounding him, Cerdan Jr. made his American debut in

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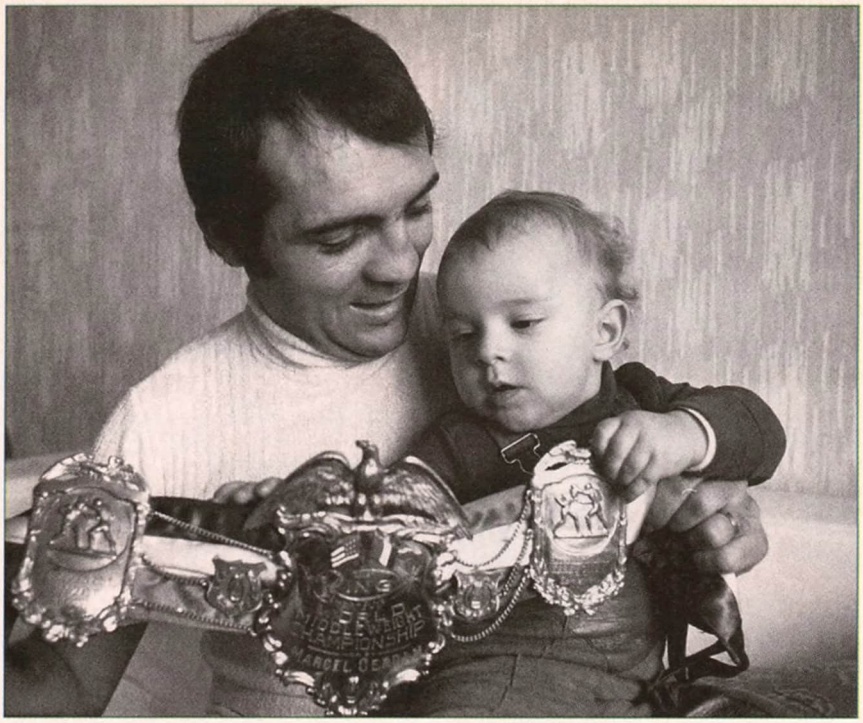
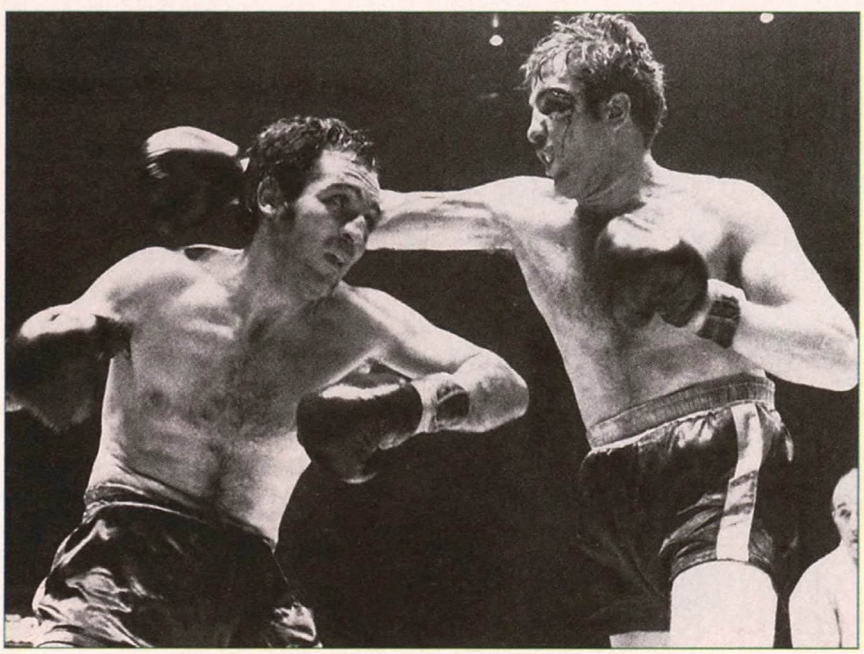


Marcel Cerdan Jr. shows his son, Nicolas, grandfather's RING championship belt (above). Cerdan Jr. wanted badly to follow in his father's footsteps, but when he got his big chance at Madison Square Garden, he lost a decision of Donato Paduano (below) and never fought in the United Stated again.



New York against Donato Puduano. He asked writer Mark Kram, "Will they love me in New York the way they loved my father?" Kram didn't answer. Cerdan Jr. fought well, but lost the bout on points. After the loss, Cerdan uncorked a bottle of champagne and asked reporters, "What did you think of me?" They applauded politely. Later, Cerdan Jr. sat in his dressing room and cried.

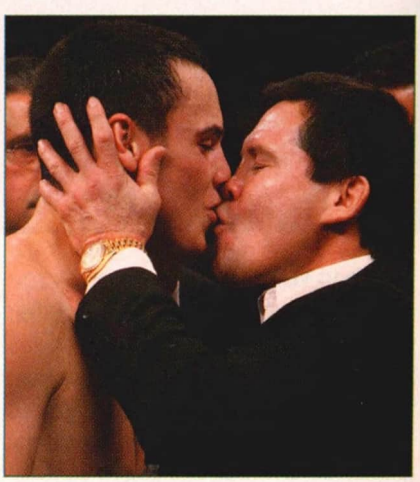
Cerdan Jr. always seemed a lonely chaser of ghosts. His mother, Marinette, once told *Sports Illustrated*, "To be his father, that is all he ever dreamed." Ten years after he retired from boxing, Cerdan Jr. portrayed his father in the 1983 French film *Edith et Marcel*. He currently operates a mail order business called The Marcel Cerdan Heritage Boutique, offering a line of jackets and shoes similar to those his father wore.

Some think Julio Cesar Chavez casts a similar shadow over his son's career. In actuality, Chavez casts a great light for Chavez Jr. to bask in. The legend doesn't inhibit Chavez Jr.; it emboldens him. And unlike Cerdan Jr., who didn't inherit his father's killer instinct, Chavez Jr. is showing signs that he can fight.

"He's the new Oscar De La Hoya," said an emotional John Iturvalde of the Latin News Service. "He has the height, the look, and a beautiful style." Later, after Chavez Jr. changed into his street clothes, members of the Latin press scrambled to give up their seats for him, like guests at a mafia wedding currying the Don's favor. *Please, son of the great Chavez, it would be an honor to stand while you take my seat.* Chavez Jr. breezed past them, too absorbed in his own thoughts to acknowledge or even notice their beatific expressions.

The story of Chavez Jr. may play out on a grand stage, but it's a very basic tale of a son entering the family business. At times, he's joked that he wants to be even greater than his father, but in more candid moments he says he simply wants to be a good fighter. He's also downplayed his role in his father's recent lifestyle changes, saying only, "He did it for himself." But as they watched the main event in Madison Square Garden, the elder Chavez placed his arm around his son's shoulder. He stayed that way for most of the night, like a man clinging to a life raft. ■

Don Stradley is a freelance writer from Massachusetts and a regular contributor to THE RING.



Chavez Sr. plants one on his son's lips after the Wiley fight. There are many insiders who believe that Chavez senior, who had fallen into a destructive lifestyle, turned his life around so that he could set a better example for his son.

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May 2000: Bernard Hopkins: "Just Because I Can Fight Doesn't Mean I Can't Think." Also: Klitschko brothers, Randall Bailey, Erik Morales, Vargas-Quartey preview.

July 2000: The Junior Welterweight Division: The Class Of Boxing. Also: Morales, Barrera, Trinidad-Reid, Beau Jack.

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PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

DO YOU BELIEVE IN "MAGIC"?

Paulie Malignaggi's Backing Up His Talk And Converting The Critics

By Eric Raskin

There are compliments. And then there are *compliments*. When a fan passes Paulie Malignaggi on the street and offers him praise for a recent performance, it certainly means a lot to him and makes him feel like he's doing something right. But it's not quite the same as receiving commendation from the person more qualified to judge what he's just done than anyone else in the world.

After Malignaggi's stirring and bruising June 10, 2006, loss to Miguel Cotto, in which "The Magic Man" fought through a broken orbital bone and internal bleeding to give the unbeaten Puerto Rican the closest fight of his career, he received a phone call from Arturo

Malignaggi used an entertaining combination of slick boxing and crisp punching against Ndou, and even managed to deck the Australian tough guy with a counter right in the ninth round. The victory was impressive enough to vault "The Magic Man" into the upper echelon of THE RING's 140-pound ratings.

PHOTOS BY EMILY HARNEY/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Gatti. If there's one person on the planet a young fighter should feel honored to hear on the other end of the line telling him what heart he showed, it's Gatti.

After Malignaggi's near-flawlessly dominant June 16, 2007, win over Lovemore Ndou, in which the 26-year-old junior welterweight put on a sheer boxing display that resulted in the most one-sided loss of Ndou's 55-fight career, he received a phone call from Floyd Mayweather. If there's one person on the planet a young fighter should feel honored to hear on the other end of the phone telling him what skills he showed, it's Mayweather.

Perhaps the most telling thing about those two fights, the fights that at this point define the career of Malignaggi, 23-1 (5), is that he didn't have to sacrifice all Mayweather-like tendencies to be like Gatti, and he didn't have to sacrifice all Gatti-like tendencies to be like Mayweather. Against Cotto, he was ballsy and dramatic, but he also did his fair share of crafty boxing. Against Ndou, he was precise and elusive, but he also managed to keep the fight entertaining and hold the Mohegan Sun crowd's enthusiasm through all 12 rounds of a fight that was as good as over at the halfway point.

It isn't easy for a guy with a knockout rate of 20.8 percent (and a knockout rate of just 9.5 percent since winning each of his first three pro fights by kayo) to be both victorious and entertaining. If you don't have that eraser in your gloves, you usually have to choose one or the other. Either you go out of your way to be exciting and risk ending up like Jason Litzau, losing by knockout to a fighter you should beat, or you go out of your way to win the fight as carefully as possible and risk ending up like Andre Dirrell, who may never get a shot on HBO again after turning in the stinker of all stinkers in the co-feature to Malignaggi-Ndou.

"It's a fine balance," Malignaggi admitted, his Brooklyn accent wrapping itself around each word, "because you want to be entertaining, but if you get beat trying to be entertaining, the only one that loses out is you. They'll forget about you, and the next week they'll be talking about the next guy. But you have to be entertaining if you want people to come back and see you. That's what gets you the ratings numbers.

"It's very important for me to be both. You don't just want to be remembered in history as a good

THE MAGIC MOUTH

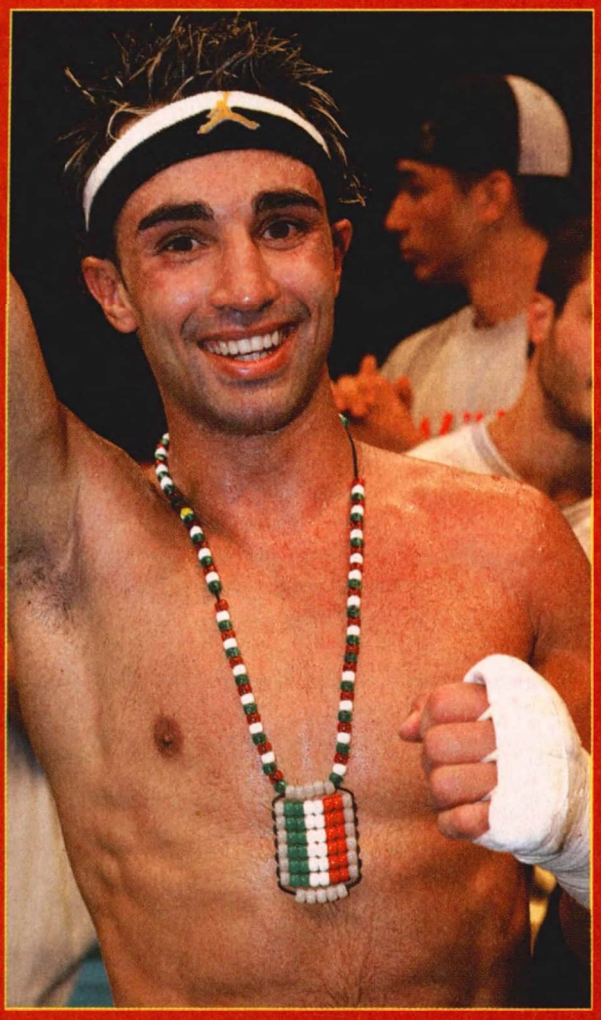


PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Malignaggi has the skills to back up his trash talk

Nobody will ever accuse Paulie Malignaggi of being a dull interview subject. And few who actually interview him will accuse him of being the jerk he sometimes sounds like when his quotes are put to print, because there's an underlying charm, even when he's at his most egocentric. When he says something like, "One by one, all of these fighters will fall, because Paulie Malignaggi's got enough skills to beat every one of them," there's an innocent exuberance about it that wins you over.

The old-schoolers, however, may have trouble forgiving one particular rant he went on during his interview with THE RING for this article.

"I believe Floyd Mayweather—and I know people are going to hate me for this—I believe Floyd is the best fighter ever," Malignaggi asserted, bringing the total number of fighters who have gone on record with that opinion to two.

If that statement was mildly outrageous, then the follow-up was downright blasphemous.

"I've looked at tapes of Sugar Ray Robinson; I believe he over-commits a lot, he falls in a lot."

There's nothing like a punk kid critiquing the man for whom the term "pound-for-pound" was invented. Guess you'll just have to take our word for it about that "underlying charm" thing.

—E.R.

fighter. You want to be remembered for giving the fans what they wanted."

A little more than a year ago, it was unclear whether Malignaggi would be remembered as either one. He was just one of the many undefeated prospects out there, one of the many receiving a promotional push with a hefty helping of hype, one of the many who hadn't yet offered any real proof in the ring that he was worthy of the hype. And Malignaggi had an extra strike against him that made him a target for critics: an egotistical persona, in the mold of a Hector Camacho or Naseem Hamed. As with "The Macho Man" and "The Prince," there was a tongue-in-cheek element to it, and it appeared there was a likeable guy lurking beneath the meticulously spiked hair, the Billy Idol sneer, and the glittery ring wear. But until some evidence was presented that the checks his ego was writing wouldn't bounce, there was a sizeable contingent of boxing writers and fans calling him a fraud and waiting expectantly for him to lose.

When he signed to fight Cotto at Madison Square Garden last year, it looked almost like a foregone conclusion that the waiting was about to end. Malignaggi hadn't beaten anyone to earn a fight of this magnitude (Donald Camarena, Ramiro Cano, and Paul Delgado were some of the top names on his resume) and was picked mainly because he could help fill seats in New York and because he couldn't punch. But a funny thing happened on the way to the result everyone expected: Malignaggi gave Cotto hell and showed balls big enough for the Knicks to use during shoot-arounds.

Malignaggi's promoter, Lou Dibella, called it "one of the terrific losing efforts in recent memory." Without a doubt, it advanced his popularity farther than any of his wins.

The network programmers recognized this, and, in his next fight after healing from his injuries, Malignaggi (working with new trainer Buddy

McGirt) made his HBO debut, using a busy jab to easily decision a reluctant Edner Cherry. From there it was on to the bout with Ndou, who wasn't as reluctant, to the delight of the live crowd and the HBO viewers. Malignaggi truly shined against his slower foe, scoring round after round with quick left jabs and rapid-fire right hands, while barely getting touched with anything in return.

Malignaggi's lead became almost insurmountable when a frustrated Ndou, 45-9-1 (30), lost a point in the sixth round for rabbit punching, and midway through the ninth a counter right to the jaw put the sturdy-chinned South African in an unfamiliar spot: on the canvas. Two judges had Malignaggi hurling a shutout, 120-106, while the third had it 118-110. This against a fighter who, in '05, came as close as 114-112 on two cards against Junior Witter and, in '04, came as close as 115-113 on one card against Cotto.

So does Malignaggi feel as if this recent run of fights has silenced his critics?

"I feel like I've silenced the critics that respect the sport of boxing," he said. "If I haven't silenced you now, it means you don't respect the sport of boxing, you're just a Paulie Malignaggi hater.

"Listen, when you work hard at something, as I do—I've dedicated everything I have to this—obviously you want to be respected for being good at something. Sometimes the critics, it seems like they nitpick certain things, maybe because they don't like my in-your-face attitude, the flashiness, the style, but at the end of the day, you have to look at the results in the ring and you have to look at the performances in the ring. You can't judge a fighter for things that have nothing to do with his fighting ability. It seems like on my way up, a lot of people just had this opinion of me that I wasn't a top-level fighter. No matter what I did, they said, 'When he fights this guy, he's going to get beat,' or 'When he does this, he's going to get his face broken.' But I'm one of the hardest-work-

Although he lost a unanimous decision and absorbed tremendous punishment, Malignaggi's brave stand against Miguel Cotto won the spunky Italian-American more fans than all of his previous victories combined. Afterward, Malignaggi got a call from Arturo Gatti, praising his courage.

PHOTO BY NICK LAHAM/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Malignaggi eased back into action against Edner Cherry following the loss to Cotto and a lengthy layoff necessitated by the injuries he'd suffered. But Malignaggi showed no ill effects of the beating Cotto inflicted, feeding Cherry a steady diet of left jabs to win a wide decision.

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Malignaggi had to use all of his charm and his last $25 to see Naseem Hamed fight Kevin Kelley at Madison Square Garden in 1997. He came away inspired by "The Prince's" showmanship and ability to fill seats.

ing fighters you'll see. And it's a long time coming that I get my respect."

Ten years coming, to be precise. It was on June 26, 1997, that Malignaggi, then 16, first found his way into a boxing gym and began to fall in love. As is often the case, Malignaggi discovered the gym because his childhood wasn't following the fairy tale script. The son of Italian immigrants, Malignaggi was born in Brooklyn but only lived there a few months before he and his parents moved back to Italy. When Paulie was six, his brother Umberto was born and the Malignaggis decided to move back to New York—but Paulie's father, a professional soccer player, returned to Italy after only a few weeks. Paulie

didn't hear from his dad again for the next 12 years.

The Malignaggis were soon living on welfare, and though the financial situation improved three years later when Paulie's mother re-married, her new husband beat the boys and eventually threw them out of his New Jersey house. Paulie was 15 when they moved back to Brooklyn to live with their grandparents and 16 when he got thrown out of high school for repeatedly cutting class and getting into fights. So Gleason's Gym became his high school.

Malignaggi found that he had natural boxing talent, but the greater key to his rapid progression was his hunger to learn. He rarely went home immediately after finishing training, preferring to stay at the gym and observe other fighters working with other trainers. He would watch all of the fight tapes he could get his hands on. Boxing consumed him.

Especially after December 19, 1997, the night Malignaggi became certain he wanted to be a professional fighter. Malignaggi brought exactly $25 and two subway tokens with him to Madison Square Garden to watch the much-talked-about Hamed make his American debut against Malignaggi's gym mate, Kevin Kelley. The teenager had just enough money on him to cover the cheapest ticket—or so he thought. As it turned out, there was a $2 surcharge.

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Promoter Lou DiBella raises Malignaggi's arms as his cornermen hoist the new IBF junior welterweight titleholder following his belt-winning victory over Ndou. Afterward, Malignaggi got a congratulatory phone call from Floyd Mayweather.

"I didn't have the money," he recalled. "I was like, 'Aw, man,' and I was just begging the lady at the ticket booth, 'Please, can you just let me in?' She looked around for her supervisor, made sure he wasn't looking, and slipped me the ticket. I'll never know who that lady is, but I owe her big time. She's a big part of my life and my career, and she doesn't even know it."

Once inside, Malignaggi was captivated by the show Hamed put on, from his elaborate ring entrance to his electrifying off-the-floor-thrice knockout win.

"It was like, *Wow, this guy's got everybody eating out of the palm of his hand*," Malignaggi remembered. "He left a big impression on me, that fight left a big impression on me, and I left there saying, 'I want to be here in this building some day fighting for a championship.'"

Hamed wasn't the only fighter on

the card who left an impression on Malignaggi. Future titlist Joan Guzman, fighting for only the second time as a pro, entered the ring for his undercard four-rounder with a distinctive head of bleached-blond hair. It's no coincidence that for his win over Ndou, Malignaggi's spikes were bright yellow, or that he turned even more heads in the Cherry fight by sporting a Smurfy blue coif.

"This is a sport where sometimes you have to push a little harder to get recognition, to have that crossover appeal," Malignaggi said. "So the crazy hairstyles, maybe I'll make the not-so-fanatical boxing fans remember me the next time. The crazy outfits too. It's all part of the hook. Boxing needs fighters with crossover appeal, and I believe I have what it takes to be a crossover star. I speak well, I'm a good-looking guy, I'm outgoing, and most importantly, I believe I can fight."

As such, Malignaggi is not shy about calling out the best in the division, reigning world champion Ricky Hatton. The junior welterweight class was one of boxing's deepest a few short years ago, but now there isn't much for Hatton to choose from in terms of marketable challengers, so a guy like Malignaggi, who moved into THE RING rankings by beating Ndou and now is rated as "The Hitman's" number-three challenger, who is becoming increasingly well-known, who knows how to self-promote, probably makes more sense for him than anyone else at 140.

"I think Hatton's a one-trick pony," opined promoter DiBella, "and I think Paulie could beat Hatton. I think Paulie's the bigger, tougher guy. I think Paulie beats almost anybody at 140. Kendall Holt, Vivian Harris, Demetrius Hopkins—those fights are bad style fights. I wouldn't want to see them because I just don't want to see those two styles clash. But in terms of anybody that's going to try to hurt him or come right at him, I don't see a guy at 140 he doesn't beat.

"I just worry that if Hatton winds up fighting [Floyd] Mayweather first, he'll get so destroyed that he'll never wind up fighting anyone of that style again. I think the only way Paulie's going to get the fight with Hatton is if the Mayweather fight's not made."

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Malignaggi would like nothing better than to challenge world junior welterweight champion Ricky Hatton. It's a fight that would probably pack Madison Square Garden, but DiBella is worried that Mayweather will get to Hatton first.

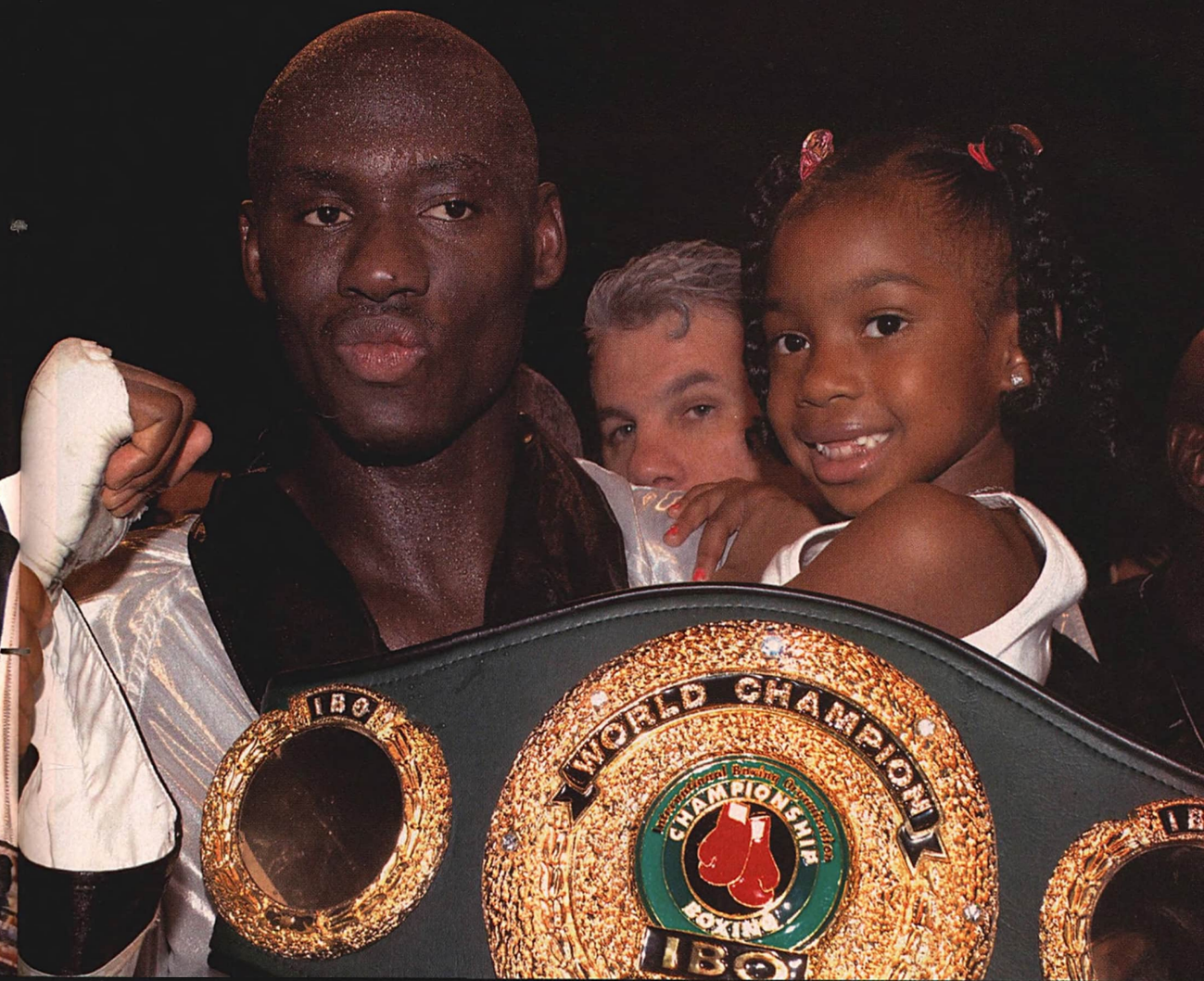
As of press time, the promoters of Mayweather and Hatton were in serious discussions to put that battle of RING champions together. That could be bad news for Malignaggi. He may have to settle for lesser fights, like an alphabet mandatory against Herman Ngoudjo. But he's young. He has time. It never hurts to add wins to your resume and increase your profile while waiting for the mega-fights.

It's just hard to wait sometimes when you believe so deeply that you can beat boxing's best.

"Prior to these last three fights," DiBella said, "I think the only person who believed Paulie was as good as he is was Paulie."

But that's all in the past tense. Now, Malignaggi's not alone in respecting his abilities. Arturo Gatti has come around. Floyd Mayweather has come around. And a lot of those haters waiting to see him get beaten or get his face broken are coming around too. ■

Daddy won! Dawson and Tarver celebrate with family members after tallying wins on a Showtime doubleheader. Dawson (above) holds his gloved-up son, Prince, while new trainer, Floyd Mayweather Sr., looks delighted with both. Tarver (opposite page) poses with his five-year-old daughter, Taylor Dionne.



CLASH AT THE CROSSROADS

Dawson vs. Tarver: The Right Fight At The Right Time

By Don Stewart

PHOTOS BY EMILY HARNEY/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Chad Dawson wants to build mainstream recognition. Okay, what fighter doesn't dream of stardom? But this one actually has the skills and the potential opponents to reach the sport's upper echelon.

There's a constellation of fading stars in the light heavyweight universe, and each one is in the ultra-talented Dawson's sights. But because his name doesn't carry much weight outside of hardcore boxing circles as of yet, Dawson is too much risk and not enough reward for an old guard that can cash larger checks by fighting each other.

So Dawson doesn't have the name because the stars won't face him, thus he can't face the stars. It's a maddening Catch-22. If boxing's established faces won't give the up-and-comers chances, it's going to make it awfully hard for young prodigies like Dawson to rise to the next level. It's like a caste system. Kind of ironic for a sport that's given so many fighters from the lower rungs of the economic ladder a vehicle for social mobility.

So let's hope by the time you read this that the first target on Dawson's list, former world champ Antonio Tarver, has done the right thing and agreed to take on the 24-year-old. It's the fight that makes the most sense for both camps. Tarver was weighing his options at the end of June, when it looked doubtful that potential big-name opponents Bernard Hopkins, Winky Wright, Joe Calzaghe, and Jermain Taylor would be available for September, the month Tarver targeted for his next bout.

As this issue went to press, Showtime had reserved a September 29 slot during its free preview weekend for Tarver-Dawson. "We are looking at it," said Chris DeBlasio, Showtime's director of sports communications. "We're very interested in making that happen, and it seems to be moving forward. It's looking pretty good at this point. [Showtime boxing boss] Ken [Hershman] is very optimistic."

It's a fight that would open up a number of lucrative opportunities for the winner. It's also a fight many are already picking Dawson to win, though it would be a major step up in class for "Bad Chad."

"I think we know now that Chad Dawson is really good," Showtime analyst Al Bernstein said. "However, Tarver would be the most challenging fighter he's faced. I suspect Dawson might go in a slight favorite, but I certainly don't think it's a foregone con-

Dawson had a relatively easy chore against unheralded Jesus Ruiz, and took advantage of the opportunity by dominating the fight. As is usually the case, the lanky southpaw titleholder scored well with his left en route to his 24th consecutive victory as a pro.

clusion that Dawson will win the fight."

Tarver-Dawson would be an intriguing matchup of southpaws. If Tarver can't get his jab working, his best chance might be to go after Dawson and try to force a brawl, something he hasn't always been comfortable doing. But it might be in Tarver's best interests to press the action. He can still punch, and Dawson was floored by Eric Harding and Tomasz Adamek right hands in recent fights.

If Tarver tries to establish his distance, Dawson figures to have the hand speed and reflexes to neutralize his jab with lead rights and counters, something Hopkins did to Tarver with ease. Then, when Tarver goes flat-footed to set up his power-shots, as he often does, the taller Dawson can punish him from angles.

"I think Dawson's filled in to his light heavyweight body," said Hasim Rahman trainer Marshall Kauffman, who watched a then-middleweight Dawson make his pro debut in 2001. "I think Tarver is just not looking as good physically anymore. I think he's been in some tough fights, physically, with Glen Johnson. I like Chad Dawson, only because he's on the upside of things and Antonio Tarver's on the downside of things. Dawson's been looking better with each fight, where Tarver seems to have declined in his abilities. So I definitely like Chad Dawson in the fight. I think it's a great matchup."

While he'd never say it, Tarver probably was relieved he wasn't facing Dawson on June 9, when the two fought separate bouts on a Showtime doubleheader.

Initially, Tarver was scheduled to return from last summer's one-sided loss to Hopkins with a rare ABC date against rugged Elvir Muriqi in April. When that venture fell apart, Showtime picked up the fight. The network paired it with Dawson's first defense of the belt he took from Adamek in February, with the obvious goal of pushing for a Tarver-Dawson showdown. Holding the doubleheader on June 9 wasn't exactly ideal for building momentum, though.

The Hartford, Connecticut, card went head-to-head with the electric Miguel Cotto-Zab Judah pay-per-view show at a sold-out Madison Square Garden. Tarver's less-than-impressive decision over Muriqi and Dawson's blowout of overmatched challenger Jesus Ruiz perhaps captured that elusive too-cheap-to-buy-PPV-but-not-too-cheap-to-order-Showtime demographic, but those weren't the fights people were talking about the next day.

Dawson, 24-0 (16), dominated Ruiz with his right jab and improving left, while Ruiz, 19-5-(17) did an excellent job getting punched in the face and midsection for 5½ rounds.

Finally, in the sixth, Dawson trapped a hurt Ruiz along the ropes, forcing ref Johnny Callas to stop it at the 2:00 mark.

"I think I have the best jab in the business right now, thanks to Floyd Mayweather Sr.," Dawson said of his trainer afterward. "Once the jab gets to working, it's pretty much over."

Although he didn't put Ruiz down, Dawson hammered his outclassed challenger badly enough to force referee Johnny Callas to call a halt in the sixth round. Dawson is now gunning for Tarver and the rest of the 175-pound elite.

Back in February, Mayweather Sr. said that there was no need to rush Dawson into a big fight, that his budding star could use a couple of tune-ups. But after Dawson breezed past Ruiz, a 33-year-old who'd gone the distance with Paul Briggs and Montell Griffin, Floyd Sr. was singing a different tune to Showtime's Jim Gray.

"I think the time of the fight is right on time," he said, referring to a Tarver match. "Chad is learning like he never learned before. He never was a finisher. We've been trying to get him to finish. I've only been with him for two fights, but this fight right here, he's beginning to

Muriqi was also supposed to be an easy assignment, but the "Kosovo Kid" fought much better than many had anticipated (above). In fact, he banged away at Tarver's body (below) sufficiently to get a draw on one of the official scorecards.

show signs of being a finisher now. He's starting to become a complete fighter. I don't think anybody wants to fight this man too fast."

Tarver didn't start too fast against the determined Muriqi in the main event, which fell almost a year to the day after the loss to Hopkins. "The Kosovo Kid" was 10 years Tarver's junior, and it looked it in the early rounds as he repeatedly worked his way inside and forced a rusty "Magic Man" backward.

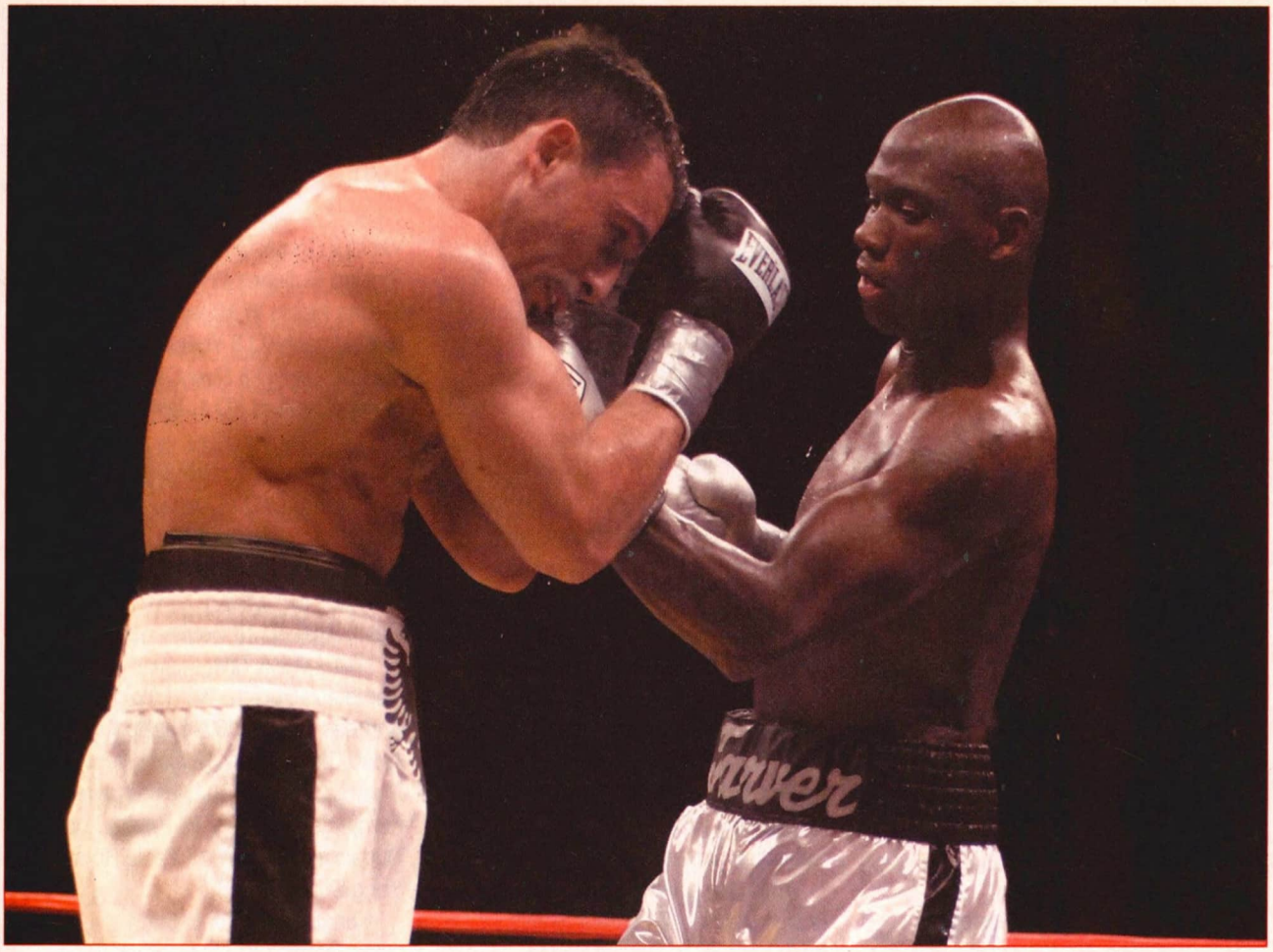
But the juices started flowing for Tarver, 25-4 (18), in the middle rounds. He began doing a better job standing his ground and using his 2½-inch reach advantage to keep Muriqi, 34-4 (21), at bay. An accidental headbutt in the fifth might have appeared to swing things in Tarver's favor, but the momentum had already begun to turn his way. Muriqi, a fourth-round knockout victim to fringe-contender Danny Santiago in 2004, seemed ready to go on a handful of occasions, including the opening minute of the 10th. But Muriqi responded to each perilous situation by throwing a flurry at a punched-out Tarver, and each time the knockout window slammed shut.

Despite scores of 116-112 (John Rupert), 115-113 (Glenn Feldman), and 114-114 (Steve Weisfeld), the fight wasn't really that close. The verdict led to some postfight smack talk in the ring from the Muriqi camp, which somehow thought their man was robbed. It also led to a humorously tense interview of Tarver by Gray that was almost as entertaining as the fight.

"I put my combinations together beautiful," said Tarver, who called for judge Weisfeld's suspension for scoring it even. "I don't go out looking for the knockout. It's been a year off. I was rusty. But I felt good in the ring. I took my time, I executed, and I dominated. Come on, man, that was a classic, classic boxing (performance). The man was never in the fight."

Classic? Yeah, and Tim Robbins' did his best acting in *Howard The Duck*. But for a 38-year-old part-time actor coming off a career-long layoff, it wasn't bad.

"Midway through the fight, Antonio's experience and skills allowed him to take control," said Tarver's promoter, Joe DeGuardia. "It was a good, tough



Once the rusty Tarver got going, he rocked Muriqi several times, showing brief flashes of the form he'd displayed beating Roy Jones and Glen Johnson several years ago. If he accepts a fight with Dawson, as expected, Tarver will need to be on top of his game.

12 rounds for Antonio, and that's just what he needed."

Those tough 12 rounds out of the way, we'd expect a sharper version of Tarver against Dawson in September. When asked directly by Gray if he'd like to fight Dawson, the former champ gave an indirect response (apparently he watches a lot of CSPAN): "Do they like to fight me? That's the question. I'm the man they're gunning for. This is a historical run. We're getting ready to just be the face of this light heavyweight division. I'm back."

The face of the division is recognized champ Hopkins, who was slated to defend July 21 against Wright. In July, former light heavyweight king Roy Jones was talking about meeting an un-retiring Felix Trinidad after outpointing Anthony Hanshaw on July 14. Super middleweight ruler Joe Calzaghe appeared headed toward a unification fight with Mikkel Kessler, while middleweight champ Jermain Taylor was finalizing details for a September 29 defense against Kelly Pavlik.

That left Glen Johnson and Jeff Lacy as the two biggest names available. Since regaining the light heavyweight crown from Johnson in 2005, Tarver has been reluctant to grant the veteran a rubber match. Dawson's camp, meanwhile, is gunning a little higher. "The guy has 11 losses," manager Mike Criscio said of Johnson. "What are we gonna get out of it?"

Lacy could lure Tarver and Dawson away from each other, though, depending on when he returns from the rotator cuff tear he suffered last December. Tarver was penciled in to face Lacy in late-2006, but the two sides couldn't come to terms. Heading into the Muriqi fight, Tarver said he'd prefer to fight Lacy next "because I think Jeff has the bigger name right now than Chad Dawson."

Lacy took a 12-round beating from Calzaghe in March of 2006, and would figure to be an easier task than Dawson. So name recognition is a convenient excuse for Tarver, who is getting pretty creative with his excuses. Heading into the Muriqi bout, he made claims that he'd been poisoned before the Hopkins fight, a claim few took seriously. Still, Tarver's meals in Hartford were well-guarded.

When he's not managing Dawson, Criscio is a bondsman. He's also worked as a prison guard. "I can tell by looking at someone if they're afraid," he said. Sure, Criscio is a biased source, but he claims he sees fear in Tarver's eyes whenever Dawson's name is mentioned.

Maybe it's just smack talk, a simple ploy to get Tarver in the ring with his fighter. Maybe there's some truth to it. Or maybe Dawson's just an over-hyped youngster waiting to get exposed, much like Lacy was a year-and-a-half ago.

"Tarver's on his way out," Dawson said. "I'm on my way up."

Let's get them together and find out. ■

Don Stewart covers boxing for the Reading (Pennsylvania) Eagle and is a regular contributor to THE RING.

[Summary]

Heavyweights

Wladimir Klitschko KO 6
Lamon Brewster
(*Retains IBF Title*)
Evander Holyfield W 10 Lou Savarese
Fres Oquendo W 10 Elieser Castillo
Francois Botha W 12 Bob Mirovic
Hasim Rahman W 10 Taurus Sykes
Oliver McCall W 12 Sinan Samil Sam
Juan Carlos Gomez W 12
Dennis Bakhtov
Alexander Povetkin W 10 Larry Donald
Henry Akinwande W 10 Andriy Oleinyk
Jean Bergeron W 10 Robert Hawkins
Timor Ibragimov W 10 Timo Hoffmann
Tony Thompson KO 5 Luan Krasniqi
Alexander Dimitrenko KO 5
Malcolm Tann
Guillermo Jones W 8 Zack Page
DaVarryl Williamson KO 3
Maurice Wheeler
Cliff Couser KO 2 Monte Barrett
Demetrice King KO 4 Bermane Stiverne
Chris Arreola KO 1 Derek Berry
JD Chapman KO 3 Jeff Yeoman
Friday Ahunanya D 8 Franklin Lawrence
Friday Ahunanya KO 2 James Walton

Cruiserweights

Enzo Maccarinelli W 12
Wayne Braithwaite
Darnell Wilson KO 11 Emmanuel Nwodo
Firat Arslan W 12 Valery Brudov
Johnathon Banks KO 4
Gustavo Enriquez
Vassiliy Jirov KO 2 Kenny Craven
Herbie Hide KO 1 Aleh Dubiaha

Light Heavyweights

Bernard Hopkins W 12 Ronald Wright
(*Retains World Title*)
Zsolt Erdei KO 11 George Blades
Roy Jones Jr. W 12 Anthony Hanshaw
Danny Green KO 3 Otis Griffin
Rachid Kanfouah W 10 Karim Bennama
Richard Stewart KO 6 James North

Super Middleweights

Anthony Mundine W 12 Pablo Nievas
Librado Andrade KO 2 Ted Muller
Denis Inkin KO 5 Jozsef Nagy
Allan Green KO 1 Darrell Woods
Fulgencio Zuniga W 10 Antwun Echols
Vitali Tsypko KO 1 Maxim Goloviznin
Mads Larsen W 8
Hector Javier Velazco
Lucian Bute W 12 Sakio Bika
Peter Manfredo Jr. W 10 David Banks
Andre Dirrell W 10 Curtis Stevens
Andre Ward KO 3 Francisco Diaz
Jesse Brinkley KO 9 Dallas Vargas
Jaidon Codrington KO 2
Carl Cockerham
James McGirt Jr. KO 1 Delray Raines

Middleweights

Felix Sturm W 12
Noe Tulio Gonzalez Alcoba
(*Retains WBA Title*)
Sebastian Sylvester KO 11
Amin Asikainen
Ruben Diaz W 12 Laurent Gomis
Brian Vera W 10 Darnell Boone
Kenny Kost W 10 Matt Vanda
Denny Dalton KO 10 Winston Pompey
John Duddy KO 10 Alessio Furlan
Roman Aramian KO 9 Ebubekir Bulut
Maselino Masoe KO 4
Dechapon Suwannalert
Andy Lee KO 2 Thomas Hengstberger

Junior Middleweights

Joachim Alcine W 12 Travis Simms
(*Wins WBA Title*)
Zaurbek Baysangurov W 12
Hussein Bayram
Troy Browning W 10
Julio Cesar Garcia
Yory Boy Campas W 10 Billy Lyell
George Hillyard W 10 David Wakefield
Joel Julio KO 8 Cornelius Bundrage
Anton Solopov KO 7 Sintung Kietbusaba
Pawel Wolak KO 2 Edgar Reyes

Welterweights

Kermit Cintron KO 2 Walter Matthysse
(*Retains IBF Title*)
Paul Williams W 12 Antonio Margarito
Alfonso Gomez KO 7 Arturo Gatti
Matthew Hatton W 12 Edwin Vazquez
Yentour Choukri W 12 George Ungiadze
Richard Gutierrez W 10 Luciano Perez
Idiozan Matos W 10 Israel De Souza
Koji Numata KO 8 Yoshihisa Tonimura
Mike Jones KO 3 Doel Carrasquillo
Henry Crawford KO 1 Josh Hammock

Junior Welterweights

Ricky Hatton KO 4 Jose Luis Castillo
(*Retains World Title*)
Paul Malignaggi W 12 Lovemore N'dou
(*Wins IBF Title*)
Gavin Rees W 12 Souleymane M'baye
(*Wins WBA Title*)
Demetrius Hopkins KO 1 Haider Berrio
Andreas Kotelnik W 8 Laszlo Komjathi
Ajose Olusegun W 12 Gary Reid
Derrick Gainer W 10 Carlos Navarro
Fernando Angulo W 10 Patrick Lopez
Duda Yankovich W 10 Paola Rojas
Yong Sung Kim KO 5
Kongtoranee Por Surasak
Cory Peterson KO 5 Jonathan Tubbs
Harrison Cuello KO 3 Edgar Santana
Victor Ortiz KO 1 Maximino Cuevas
Jaime Clampitt W 10 Jane Couch

Lightweights

Michael Katsidis W 12 Czar Amonsot
Nate Campbell KO 6 Wilson Alcorro
Almazbek Raiymkulov W 12
Miguel Huerta
Freddie Norwood W 8
Armando Cordoba
Amir Khan KO 8 Willie Limond
Jorge Paez Jr. KO 2 Carlos Urrea
Meacher Major KO 5 Lidilo Julio
Nelson Porfirio KO 3 Jose de Barros

Junior Lightweights

Alex Arthur KO 10 Koba Gogoladze
Cassius Baloyi Tech. Draw 4
Manuel Medina
Malcolm Klassen KO 5 Edward Mpofu
Ji Hye Woo W 10 Chika Mizutani
Rafael Urias KO 9 Abel Berrelleza
Devid Lookmahanak KO 6
Falazona Fidal
Roman Martinez KO 3
Genaro Trazancos

Antonio De Vitis KO 4 Karim Chakim
Byung Joo Moon KO 4
Jung Keun Woo
Melissa Fiorentino W 8 Cindy Serrano

Featherweights

Jorge Linares KO 10 Oscar Larios
Steven Luevano KO 11 Nicky Cook
Martin Honorio W 10 Joe Morales
Miguel Roman KO 5 Jose Alonso
Rogers Mtagwa W 12 Aldo Valtierra
Juan Salgado W 10 Ivan Valle
Takahiro Aoh W 10 Keisuke Akiba
Makyo Sugita KO 9
Petchthongkam Sithprakaifah
Linden Arthur KO 8 Earl Trotmann
Wonga Mhlana KO 2 Mkhuseli Kondile
Ji Hoon Kim KO 6 Jae Kwang Jung
Jong Hoon Lee KO 4 Joon Il Lee
Napapol Kiatisakchokchai W 8
Satoshi Niwa
Chonlatarn Piriyapinyo KO
Yoddamrong Sithyodthong
Dat Nguyen KO 6 Yamin Mohammad
Kelsey Jeffries W 10 Donna Biggers

Junior Featherweights

Steve Molitor KO 9 Takalani Ndlovu
(*Retains IBF Title*)
Somsak Sithchatchawal W 6
Rey Anton Olarte
Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym KO 1
Sonny Manakane
Somsak Sithchatchawal KO 4
Kanghuyak Kansorik
Bernard Dunne W 12 Reidar Walstad
Oscar Chauke W 12 Luyanda Mrawuli
Silke Weickenmeier W 10
Maribel Santana
Satoshi Makino W 10
Thongthai Rajanondh
Juan Manuel Lopez KO 1
Giovanni Andrade
Tatsuya Tsubouchi W 10
Yusuke Morishima
Eun Kim W 10 Natsuki Fujimoto
Fahsan 3K Battery KO 2
Yuvensius La Ende

Bantamweights

Luis Perez KO7 Genaro Garcia
(*Wins Vacant IBF Title*)
Wladimir Sidorenko KO 7
Jerome Arnould
(*Retains WBA Title*)

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Featherweight Jorge Linares stings Oscar Larios with a left hook

Veeraphol Sahaprom KO 4 Satoshi Usui
Ratanachai Vorapin W 6
Roger Monserto
Dexter Marquez KO 11 Orlando Rogers
Glenn Porras W 10 Marangin Marbun
Antonio Meza KO 3 Romel Aguilar
Ryuichi Okahashi KO 2
Worawut Muangsima
Veerapol Sahaprom W 8 Satoshi Niwa
Anselmo Moreno W 10 Tomas Rojas
Diego Hernandez W 10 Diego Silva
Andy Bell W 10 Mo Khaled

Junior Bantamweights

Cristian Mijares KO 10 Teppei Kikui
(*Retains WBC Title*)
Fernando Montiel KO 10 Cecilio Santos
Katsushige Kawashima KO 3
Jae Sung Myung
Pramuansak Posuwan KO 7
Jemmy Gobel
Katsumi Makiyama W 8
Junichi Ebisuoka

Flyweights

Daisuke Naito W 12
Pongsaklek Wonjongkam
(*Wins WBC Title*)
Nonito Donaire KO 5 Vic Darchinyan
(*Wins IBF Title*)
Takefumi Sakata W 12 Roberto Vasquez
(*Retains WBA Title*)
Denkaosan Kaovichit W 12
Richard Olisa
Santiago Ivan Acosta W 12
Ricardo Ariel Toledo
Gilberto Keb Baas D 12
Rodolfo Martinez
Katsuhiko Arakaki W 10
Samransak Singmanassak
Elena Reid W 10 Shin Hee Choi
Shingo Yamaguchi W 10
Suriya Klongpajol

Junior Flyweights

Juan Carlos Reveco KO 8
Nethra Sasiprapa
(*Wins Vacant WBA Title*)
Phumzile Matyhila W 12
Sizwe Sinyabi
Shingo Yamaguchi W 10
Suriya Khlongphajon
Humberto Pool KO 10 Oscar Martinez
Takashi Kunishige Tech. Win 9
Keisuke Akagi
Juanito Rubillar KO 5 Ken Nakajima
Juan Jose Landaeta KO 2 Edwin Diaz
Suguru Takizawa KO 2
Jampathorn Polsongkram
Pascasio Zarate W 6 Marco Sanchez
Julia Sahin W 10 Hollie Dunaway

Strawweights

Florante Condes W 12
Muhammad Rachman
(*Wins IBF Title*)
Ronald Barrera W 10 Nelson Cantero
Donnie Nietes KO 7
Saengpetch Sor Sakulphan

Wladimir Klitschko KO 6 Lamon Brewster

Cologne, Germany: Headed for heavyweight boxing's scrap yard three years ago when Brewster, 228¼, Vero Beach, Florida, via Indianapolis, Indiana, stopped him at the end of the fifth round, Klitschko, 243½, Kiev, Ukraine, avenged the most painful defeat of his career with a comprehensive victory at the Cologne Arena. It was one-sided and absolutely devoid of drama—the 6'6" Ukrainian's jab made certain of this—and Brewster's tenuous position in the higher order of active heavyweights was obliterated. Klitschko, while making the third defense of the IBF heavyweight title he claimed from Chris Byrd, more importantly reaffirmed his status as the foremost heavyweight in the world.

This is a much-maligned distinction in an uninspiring era for the sport's big men. A conspicuous lack of compelling contenders and the continued fragmentation of the title have combined to leave interest in the division at an all-time low. This is no fault of Klitschko, who has come back from defeats by Ross Purrity early in his career, a devastating second-round stoppage by Corrie Sanders, and then the Brewster setback. He had won six bouts since that fateful first meeting, including a points decision over highly regarded Samuel Peter, so Emanuel Steward's contention that, finally, he is evolving into the fighter he had always promised to be is significant.

"Winning this rematch with Brewster was very important because everything else can be forgotten and we just move on to demonstrating Wladimir's superiority over every heavyweight fighter in the world," said Klitschko's respected trainer.

Brewster, 33-4 (29), had lost the WBO belt he won from Klitschko in their first bout when Sergei Liakhovich beat him last year. During the fight, he suffered a detached retina in his left eye that required surgery, and the suspicion that he would not be up to the task of seriously challenging Klitschko, 49-3 (44), a second time proved well founded. Of course, he had taken a beating in the first fight too before he prevailed, but his motivation no longer burnt with the same intensity and he was a compliant victim in a rematch that was never in doubt beyond the first couple of rounds.

The challenger's only chance was to pressure Klitschko, and he came forward aggressively at the first bell, driving his 31-year-old opponent into the ropes. But Klitschko quickly found his rhythm and began to land his long left jab. Assistant trainer James Ali Bashir would subsequently claim that Klitschko's middle finger in his left hand was broken in the opening round, but the fighter denied the report, insisting "it's not a big issue," and he had no problem utilizing the jab to a debilitating degree. He forced Brewster into a neutral corner with a right hand to the side of the head, but was content to outbox his opponent, which he continued to do in the second round in a methodical manner, completely in control.

Brewster was impotent in this kind of match and frustration crept in. He missed wildly with a right and a left before Klitschko made him pay by countering with two sharp left hooks to the head. Klitschko was relaxed while he probed for openings and unloaded punches with impunity. By the end of the third round, he was commanding the action with his jab.

At the start of round five, Klitschko drove Brewster into the ropes with a heavy right hand and he resumed the punishment that his jab had meted out for the previous four rounds. Steward was convinced in the corner that the end was imminent and told his fighter as much between the fifth and sixth rounds, while in the opposite corner, Buddy McGirt was telling Brewster that he would give him only one more round unless he showed something in the sixth. It was not forthcoming from a dispirited and outgunned Brewster, who took more than 160 jolting jabs during the fight. Wearily, he walked back to his stool at the midway point of the 12-rounder to be met by his trainer, who told him enough was enough.

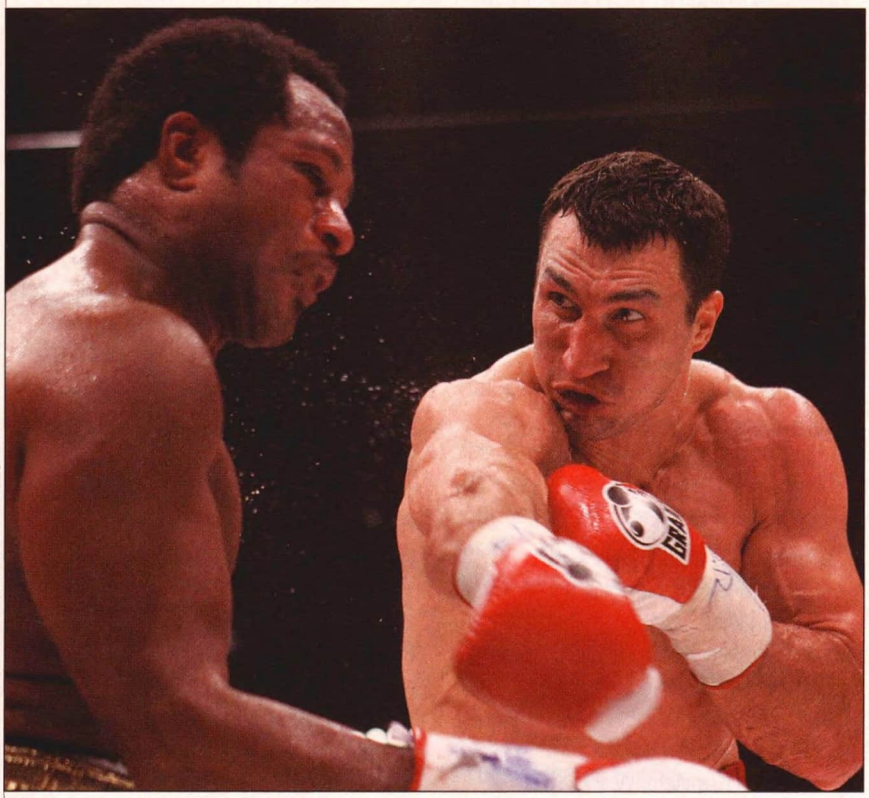


PHOTO BY PATRIK STOLLARZ/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Klitschko drills Brewster en route to easy victory

Referee Sam Williams (USA) was informed and he waved it over.

"I have come back from the hell of boxing," Klitschko emphasized, referring to the first fight with Brewster when most critics wrote him off. "That is all behind me now and I'm only looking forward."

Television: **HBO**
Promoter: **K2 Promotions**
(7-7-07)
Brian Doogan

Joachim Alcine W 12 Travis Simms

Bridgeport, Connecticut: Junior middleweights Simms and Alcine seemed to develop a genuine hatred for each other during the build-up to Don King's "Fistic Fireworks" card. When the two were ordered to touch 'em up after the prefight instructions, Simms took a wild swing at Alcine's gloves. But what appeared to be the makings of fistic fireworks turned out to be mere sound and fury that signified nothing.

After 12 less-than-thrilling rounds, to be kind, the Haitian-born Canadian Alcine, 152¼, walked away with a comfortable unanimous decision and Simms' WBA belt. It was a homecoming defense for the 36-year-old Simms, 152½, who landed a number of decent countershots throughout. But the judges apparently weren't impressed with his decision to hold the taller Alcine whenever the two got close.

"It wasn't a great fight," said Alcine, 31, the first native Haitian to win a major title belt. "I didn't think I showed the best of me tonight. I didn't get the proper sparring for this fight. Next time, I'm going to take the time and watch the tape because I didn't get a chance to watch any tape of him."

The Arena at Harbor Yard crowd booed throughout what was a stop-and-go affair, especially in the early and middle rounds. The fight was further marred by Alcine constantly stepping on the southpaw Simms' lead foot, two point deductions, and a questionable knockdown.

Simms, 25-1 (19), appeared to get out to an early lead on the cards as Alcine, 29-0 (18), struggled with his opponent's awkward style. Facing a four-inch reach deficit, Simms lunged forward with shots, then either tied up or retreated in hopes of catching the forward-pressing Alcine with counters. Alcine appeared content trying to control the fight with his jab.

The Ring Fighter of the Month

Nonito Donaire

We all know what happens when you assume. But Vic Darchinyan did it anyway. And frankly, so did the rest of us. We all assumed that because Darchinyan had no trouble whatsoever with Glenn Donaire when they fought last October, he would wipe the canvas with Glenn's little brother, Nonito, as well. Turns out if you've seen one Donaire, you haven't seen them all. "The Filipino Flash" was a step ahead of the previously unbeaten Darchinyan throughout before violently acquainting him with defeat via a sizzling counter left hook in the fifth round.

How good was the finishing punch? Five minutes later, Darchinyan still couldn't quite put the pieces together, claiming he was never hurt even though the shot dropped him hard and left him wobbling drunkenly when he tried to rise. But this wasn't some miracle one-punch kayo. Donaire had been zeroing in with that counter left since the start of the fight, having studied Darchinyan and prepared to take advantage of his openings.

Darchinyan, meanwhile, appeared not to have prepped properly. When you're 28-0 with 22 knockouts, when victory is all you know, you tend not to even consider the possibility of defeat. But now Darchinyan is doing more than considering it. He's living with it. And Donaire, a huge underdog going into the bout, is living with Fighter of the Month honors.

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

The turning point for Alcine came early in the sixth, when referee Michael Ortega (USA) penalized him one point for hitting on the break. Picking up the pace, Alcine began landing effectively to Simms' body. He snapped Simms' head back with a short left in the seventh, picked up a point in the eighth when Simms was penalized for holding and hitting, then scored a fluky knockdown early in the ninth on what appeared

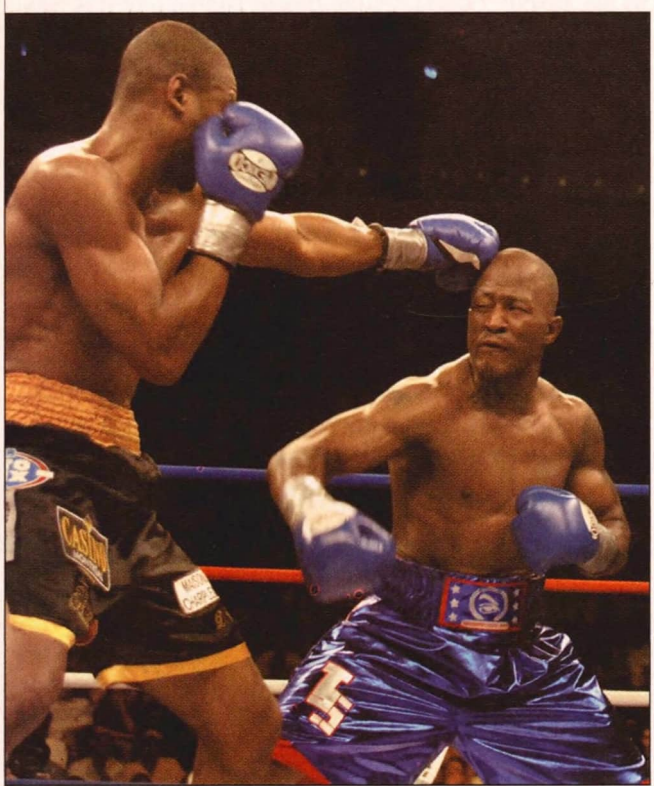


PHOTO BY EMILY HARNEY/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Alcine's jab was a major factor against Simms

in real time to be a slip. But replays showed that, while Simms' foot did come out from under him on the slippery canvas, a quick left hand also scored to put him down for the first time in his career.

Sensing he was behind heading into the 12th, Simms switched to an orthodox stance in hopes of landing a home-run left hook. The change only opened him up to Alcine's long jab, which won the Haitian the round. Judge George DeGabriel (USA) scored the fight 114-111, Glenn Feldman (USA) had it 115-110, and Tom Kaczmarek (USA) saw it 116-109, all for Alcine. THE RING had Alcine winning by a tighter margin of 113-112.

Afterward, Simms claimed he hurt his right hand in the second round and began lobbying for a rematch. King, who promotes both fighters, didn't include Simms' name when mentioning potential opponents for Alcine, who waited nine months for his shot at the belt. Alcine was the mandatory challenger to then-titlist Jose Antonio Rivera, but Simms sued to get the shot before Alcine. Despite the loss, Simms wouldn't admit he'd been wrong in calling Alcine a glorified sparring partner.

"I don't regret that," Simms said. "I still say that. But I take my hat off to him. He did what he had to do. No excuses. I hurt my hand, but I'll be back."

Television: **Showtime**
(7-7-07)

Luis Perez KO 7 Genaro Garcia

Bridgeport, Connecticut: On a card overflowing with upsets, including Joachim Alcine-Travis Simms, Nonito Donaire-Vic Darchinyan, Demetrice King-Bermane Stiverne, and Cliff Couser-Monte Barrett, Perez avoided getting bit by that particular bug, winning over underdog Garcia and extending his record to a perfect 5-0 in title fights. The former IBF 115-pound beltholder moved up to bantamweight for this match for the IBF belt vacated by Rafael Marquez, and he looked quite comfortable at the new weight as he pummeled Garcia for all six-rounds-and-change that the fight at the Arena and Harbor Yard lasted.

Perez, 118, Managua, Nicaragua, lived up to his nickname of "El Demoledor" ("The Demolition Man") from the outset. The southpaw hurt veteran contender Garcia, 118, Puebla, Mexico, with a left to the body in the first round, and early in the second, he snapped Garcia's head back with a straight left. With Garcia, 29, in obvious distress late in the second round, Perez, 29, hunted him down, pinned him on the ropes, and floored him with a left to the chin. Garcia rose, but all the gutsy Mexican did from that point forward was take more punishment.

Garcia stood and exchanged over the next several rounds, but it was always Perez getting the better of the action. Finally, early in the seventh, the Nicaraguan scored with a perfect left hand, and Garcia, 35-6 (20), crashed. Referee Charles Dwyer (USA) halted the bout at the count of five, 39 seconds into the stanza.

"Garcia was very strong; he gave me an excellent challenge," Perez, 25-1 (16), said graciously. "But I think I won all the rounds. From the beginning, I could tell I had a reach advantage, so I used it."

Promoter: **Don King Productions**
(7-7-07)

Takefumi Sakata W 12 Roberto Vasquez

Tokyo, Japan: Sakata, 111¾, Japan, made his first defense of the WBA flyweight belt a successful one (and an exciting one) as he withstood the opening attacks of WBA "interim" titlist "La Arana" ("The Spider") Vasquez, 112, Panama, and pounded out a close but unanimous decision over 12 heats to avenge a close decision loss from seven months earlier. Judge Derek Milham (Australia) scored it 116-113, Jean-Louis Legland (France) 116-112, and Tom Miller (USA) 115-113, all for the Japanese titlist. The referee was Stanley Christodoulou (South Africa).

The Panamanian Spider caught the still-nervous and stiff-Sakata with strong, shots in the first three rounds. Even though people knew that Sakata was a notoriously

PHOTO BY KOICHI KAMOSHIDA/GETTY IMAGES

Sakata clips Vasquez with a right in close contest

slow starter, former junior fly titlist Vasquez looked so pugnacious and powerful that it seemed he might finish the affair within the first five rounds.

But the challenger abruptly started slowing down in the fourth, while Sakata finished warming up and began landing busy combinations to the midsection and face. The Spider sometimes landed solid shots, but they arrived one at a time, whereas the game Sakata retaliated with busier punches in combination, pinning Vasquez to the ropes. Sakata remained in command with incessant combos from the fourth through seventh.

After the fight, Vasquez confessed, "I felt a certain headache around the fifth, so I couldn't fight as strongly as in the first three rounds." Vasquez' suddenly negative performance also became a headache for his chief second, Gabriel Garibaldi, who desperately and vainly kept encouraging him to be more aggressive.

Vasquez got back into the fight in the eighth, when he displayed vaunted powerpunches to shake up Sakata. But his attack lasted only a minute, and then Sakata came back hard with faster shots to the face and midsection. Two judges gave this round to Vasquez, while the other saw it for Sakata.

The ninth was difficult to score, as Vasquez, 24-2 (17), became temporarily aggressive with solid shots that opened a gash over the beltholder's right eyebrow, but Sakata kept going forward to often nail him to the ropes with light combinations. The 10th followed a similar pattern. Though light punching, Sakata kept battering the fading Spider to confirm his victory in the last two sessions.

It was a good fight between the hard-puncher (Vasquez) and the busy combination puncher (Sakata). We also saw a good verdict turned in by the judges, which was neither controversial nor disputed even by Team Vasquez. Carlos Gonzalez, Vasquez' manager, frankly and coolly reviewed the fight, saying, "We lost today. Sakata was better than Roberto. But we look forward to the rubber match, as each won once."

Sakata, 31-4-1 (15), emotionally said, "I'm not a genius, but I kept making my best effort in all the title bouts. I never gave up, so my efforts finally paid off despite some previous discouraging failures."

Promoter: **Kyoei Promotions**

(7-1-07)

Joe Koizumi

Zsolt Erdei KO II
George Blades

Budapest, Hungary: It is unfortunate that Erdei, 172, Budapest, Hungary, operates predominantly on the fringes of the light heavyweight division, for he is an authentically capable boxer. He only needed to be plausible, however, to beat Blades, 174¼, Indianapolis, Indiana, via Orlando, Florida, whose mediocre record did not warrant an engagement with the WBO 175-pound titleholder at the SYMA Sports Center. It was Erdei's eighth defense of the belt he won from Julio Gonzalez in 2004.

Erdei, 27-0 (17), did not have to approach top gear to control the bout with his stiff left jab and accurate, damaging flurries. Blades did try to retaliate, but landed few punches of any consequence throughout the bout, and by the halfway point, he was clearly fatigued by his efforts. Having been on the receiving end mostly of jabs and stinging right hooks in the first five rounds, he felt Erdei's power in the sixth when he got hurt by a solid right. He managed to hang on and see out the danger, but the systematic beating resumed in the seventh.

As the bout wore on, Blades' fatigue led him to throw a succession of low blows that drew a warning from referee Joe Cortez (USA), who intervened finally in the

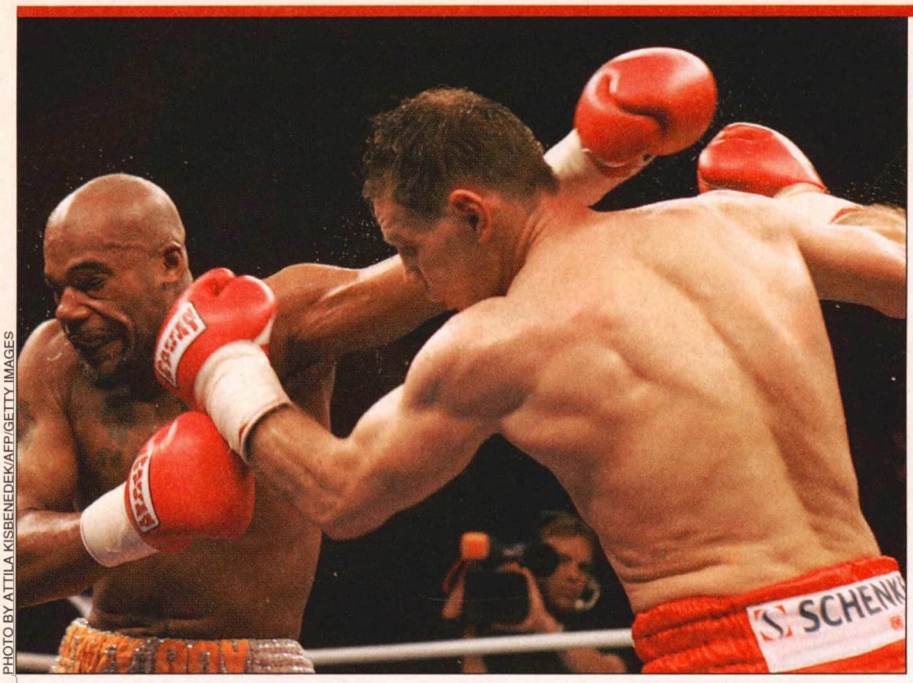


PHOTO BY ATTILA KISBENEDEK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Erdei has an easy time with mismatched Blades

11th round when the 32-year-old Blades, 21-3 (15), had been hurt again by another right hand and follow-up flurry. He did not appear to be on the verge of being stopped, but allowing the bout to carry on was a pointless exercise.

"I think the referee had enough of my opponent getting beaten up and he was right to stop the fight," said Erdei, 33, who was delighted to box in his native Hungary for the first time in almost three years after five successive appearances in Germany.

Promoter: **Universum-Box**
(6-16-07)
Brian Doogan

Hasim Rahman W 10 Taurus Sykes

Rochester, New York: When one comes into a fight after a 10-month layoff and weighs the heaviest of one's career, certain things can be predicted. While former world heavyweight champion Rahman still defeated the somewhat limited Sykes, the sluggish manner in which he won was not unexpected.

The 34-year-old Rahman, 261, Baltimore, Maryland, and the 32-year-old Sykes, 238, Brooklyn, New York, fought at one speed virtually the whole evening, and it was not overdrive. Had Rahman increased his work rate, he might have taken out his similarly inactive foe, but he did not throw often enough. "The Rock" came out jabbing early, but not often. He had opportunities to land the right, but could not pull the trigger. Sykes' best weapon was the old one-two, yet he also was reluctant to let his hands go. That was a shame because when the New Yorker did land the combination, it appeared to bother Rahman, 42-6-2 (33).

Sykes, 25-4-1 (7), wobbled Rahman briefly with a left-right in the third, but did not press his momentary advantage, and the ex-champ returned fire with two rights to the top of the head that made "The Bull" think twice about taking any more initiative. From then on, Sykes' *modus operandi* was to either hold or hit low. After having just witnessed a barnburner of a co-feature in Almazbek Raiymkulov-Miguel Huerta, the audience was not pleased with all the hugging and fouling, and during several rounds the boos could be heard from the restless in the Main Street Armory. Rahman was almost as guilty, allowing the holding and doing some of his own, and he consistently smothered his own punches when he appeared to have launched a decent offensive, allowing Sykes to hang on to him.

By the fifth round, Rahman's corner implored referee Dave Schiavone (USA) to reprimand Sykes for his low blows. His opponent's tactics were frustrating The Rock enough that he almost went after Sykes at the bell ending the round, then glared at him before returning to his own corner. Rahman charged out for round six eager to punish Sykes for his misdeeds, but after throwing a jab and an occasional right, he did not take the step back that his new trainer Marshall Kauffman instructed, and the holding resumed.

Round nine was the definitive one; Sykes had a point deducted early for a low blow, then had Rock in momentary distress with a right to the top of the head followed by a two-punch combination. But late in the round, Rahman caught Sykes with a short right off a jab that put The Bull down on the seat of his pants. The knockdown sealed the outcome. Rahman finished with a flurry, rocking Sykes with lefts and rights upstairs throughout the final stanza.

Judge Frank Adams (USA) scored 98-90, Ruben Garcia (USA) had it 97-91, and Wynn Kintz (USA) tallied a closer-than-necessary 96-93, all for Rahman. THE RING scored 98-90 for Rahman.

"The rust was there after the layoff; my timing was off," said the winner. "I had to get down from 305 to 261 in four weeks of training." If Rahman is to get close to heavyweight contention, he'll need to lose more. Joe Mesi was in the crowd scouting Rahman as a possible opponent, and Mesi's footwork could pose problems for the bigger man unless he gets down to business in the gym.

Television: **Versus**
Promoter: **Top Rank**
(6-14-07)
Mike Greenhill

Almazbek Raiymkulov W 12 Miguel Angel Huerta

Rochester, New York: To say that NABF lightweight title-

PHOTO BY STEVE SAMOYEDNY/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Wide-eyed Raiymkulov was very lucky to get the nod over Huerto

holder Raiymkulov, who is more commonly known by the nickname "Kid Diamond," escaped with a controversial victory over rugged Mexican challenger Huerta would be the understatement of 2007 so far. When the decision was announced at the conclusion of the co-feature to the Rahman-Sykes bout, so many boos rained down from the Main Street Armory crowd that one would have thought Barry Bonds had just entered the building. The 29-year-old southpaw Huerta, 134¾, Mexico City, Mexico, nicknamed "El Anestisista," did his best to put the 29-year-old Raiymkulov, 134¾, Las Vegas, Nevada, via Kyrgyzstan, to sleep, awakening the 3,200 attendees to one of the best fights of the year.

Huerta threw wide, slow punches in round one, perhaps lulling Raiymkulov into a false sense of security. The Mexican began making the titleholder pay for his lax attitude from the second round on. He began timing Diamond with surprising and definitive results. Every time Diamond, 25-1-1 (14), dropped his right, Huerta, 24-8-1 (17), made him eat a left. At times the Kid trapped Huerta on the ropes and in the corners with bodyshots, but the gutsy Huerta always responded in kind.

Huerta repeatedly snapped Diamond's head back with hard lefts in the middle rounds. Both combatants traded bombs in the center of the ring as the crowd was in a frenzy. Huerta stunned Raiymkulov in the sixth with a straight left that forced him to back up. While Diamond was scoring with bodywork and combos upstairs, Huerta's counterpunching made many of the rounds Diamond won extremely close.

Huerta's best round was the seventh; he continued to rake Diamond with straight lefts, then went to the conventional stance and hit him with counter rights that made his opponent's hair fly. In Raiymkulov's corner, trainer Miguel Diaz implored his charge to keep his right up, but Diamond was not listening. But with his left eye cut, he did begin to show a sense of urgency. Diamond let his hands go more, but the relentless Huerta, whose own left eye was swelling by now, took nary a step back. Diamond's best round was the 10th, when he scored with three-punch combinations and double jabs, putting Huerta on the retreat for the first time in the fight.

But any rally by Diamond was short-lived. Huerta knocked him down with a classic right-left combo in the 11th. Diamond looked shocked to be on his behind, and now his nose was also bleeding. Before the final heat, Raiymkulov's corner told him he needed a knockout to win. He responded in the 12th, going to war with Huerta, who was happy to oblige—to the crowd's delight.

As it turned out, two of the three American arbiters saw a completely different fight than did the fans and the ringside media. Judge Ruben Garcia's 116-111 for Huerta was overruled by the narrowest of margins by Don Ackerman and Frank Adams, who both tallied 114-113 for Diamond. THE RING scored 116-111 for Huerta. Raiymkulov is still considered one of the top lightweights in the world, but his stock fell slightly in victory, whereas Huerta's has risen considerably in defeat.

Television: **Versus**
Promoter: **Top Rank**
(6-14-07)
Mike Greenhill

Lucien Bute W 12 Sakio Bika

Montreal, Quebec: Cameroonian Bika had fallen short in a grueling fight against Joe Calzaghe for the world super middleweight title and was held to a four-round technical draw against Markus Beyer for the WBC bauble in a fight he looked poised to win before it was prematurely halted due to a butt-induced laceration suffered by Beyer. But both title tries in 2006 firmly established Bika as the type of opponent only the top-echelon super middleweights would be capable of beating (not to mention as one of the division's dirtiest fighters).

Previously untested against a legitimate top-10 foe, Bute, 27, had to call upon a mix of resourcefulness and superior skill to pull off a unanimous decision in a fight that saw Bika, 32, test his mettle on several different levels. In the end, Bute may have garnered a sizeable point spread on all the cards in the IBF title eliminator, earning the Romanian born, Montreal-based fighter a shot at the fractional belt held by Alejandro Berrios, but in no way did the numbers reflect the ruggedly competitive nature of the fight.

PHOTO BY MIKE GREENHILL

Bute demonstrates his skill with rugged win over Bika

Bika, who now fights out of Australia, came into his rival's backyard looking supremely confident and fought the first four heats accordingly. Employing his typical free-swinging style, Bika, 167½, forced the action in the early going and assertively piled up points with a heavy jab and an assortment of looping hooks to the head and midriff. Normally a quick starter himself, southpaw Bute was thrown off by Bika's full-on press and a left uppercut to the body was his only effective response.

"He confused me at the beginning. He kept a weird distance and threw punches at weird angles. But my corner and the fans helped me to turn it around," said Bute, who was emboldened by the cheers of 9,178 supporters at the Bell Centre.

The 6'2" Bute has shown remarkable adeptness at fighting in reverse throughout his brief career, and he finally found his punching range in the fourth, slowing Bika's onslaught with a snaking jab and stiff left crosses. The round, won by Bute, would also mark the first of several episodes where the fighters would violently clash heads. Although it was his headlong style that prompted the collision, it was Bika who pulled back from an exchange in the closing minute, pointing at his right eye while complaining to referee Marlon Wright (Canada), which provoked little sympathy.

Bute, 167¾, took control of the fight in the sixth by counterpunching well and scoring often when initiating exchanges. Still ripping heavy shots, Bika started to land with less frequency as his corner implored him to intensify his attack whenever Bute stopped throwing. But by the seventh, Bute was wearing a new of look of assuredness as he moved into attack mode and had Bika pinned to the ropes while opening up for the first time with a sustained volley of hooks and uppercuts.

Wright took a point from Bika, 22-3-2 (14), in the 10th for an intentional headbutt, after the fighters collided skulls once again. Sporting a welt and small cut over his right eye, the call appeared to deflate Bika, who protested vehemently and subsequently began to slow his pace despite landing well to the body. Meanwhile, Bute jumped on the opportunity, sensing his lead, and upped his volume of work in the next two rounds. By the 12th, Bute was in full control, pushing his opponent back with a stiff jab and landing counter lefts with precision. A last ditch effort to steal the round compelled Bika to action in the final minute, but Bute proved stronger, and he closed the busier of the two, landing solid uppercuts and straight left leads until the bell.

"Lucian showed a chin tonight and he had never been hit like that before. He reacted well, and finished the fight strong. What more would you want to see?" commented Bute's trainer, Stephane Larouche. "He showed he still has to learn. He's not top notch yet. But he is on his way to getting there."

Scores of 118-109 in favor of Bute from judges William James (USA) and George Hill (USA) seemed overly generous to the hometown fighter, whose record now stands at a pristine 20-0 (16). THE RING's card was in line with judge Richard Decarufel (Canada), who saw the bout 116-111.

Television: **ESPN2**
Promoter: **Interbox**
(6-15-07)
Paul Salgado

Felix Sturm W 12
Noe Tulio Gonzalez Alcoba

Stuttgart, Germany: It was tougher than it should have been, tougher even than the judges' scorecards suggested, but Sturm, 159½, Hamburg, Germany, always had his left jab to separate him from the aggressive Alcoba, 159½, Santa Fe, Argentina, via Canelones, Uruguay. The unanimous decision at the Porsche Arena was a satisfying first defense for Sturm of the WBA middleweight strap, which he regained from Spain's Javier Castillejo in April.

"All South American fighters are tough, and I knew that Alcoba would be no different, so I'm happy to have won the fight so clearly," said the 28-year-old German. "He was an awkward opponent and he was dangerous because this was his big opportunity. I hurt him, but he kept coming at me all night. He was determined to win."

Alcoba, 14-1 (7), only lacked the experience and refinement, for his application could not be questioned. He was constantly ready to punch with Sturm, whose edge in hand speed

was significant. The 28-year-old challenger also lacked concussive power, so even when he enjoyed periods of success, it proved short-lived. Sturm was always able to resume control by asserting his boxing skills, but Alcoba's commitment was exemplary throughout.

The jab was key to Sturm's strong start. He was able to penetrate Alcoba's porous guard with his signature punch seemingly at will, though the Uruguayan's capacity to walk forward under fire was ominous. Consistently, he was able to fire back with hooks to Sturm's head and body, most of which were slipped or blocked, but the sheer number of blows Alcoba threw meant that Sturm was caught by a surprising amount. He attacked strongly to the body in the third round, and the right side of Sturm's face was marked up and swollen by the midway point.

The German titleholder used greater lateral movement from the fourth round on, and this negated Alcoba's aggression, but the South American rallied hard in round eight by slipping Sturm's jab and throwing powerful hooks with considerable success. But Sturm, 28-2 (12), found his composure again in the ninth and he appeared to finally dent Alcoba's resistance with his spear-like jab and several well-placed right crosses. Perhaps he could even have done more over the final rounds to try to stop his opponent, who faded visibly in the last two in particular.

"I hit him hard earlier in the fight and he kept coming, so I was content to outbox him to the final bell," Sturm reflected. "The result was never in doubt."

Philippe Verbeke (Belgium) scored 116-112, Mikael Hook (Sweden) 120-108, and Takeski Shimakawa (Japan) 118-110, all for Sturm. THE RING's scorecard was 117-111 for the German. The referee was Puerto Rico's Roberto Ramirez.

Afterward, Sturm conveyed his eagerness to engage in a unification bout with Arthur Abraham, the Germany-based Armenian IBF middleweight titleholder. "My promoter, Peter Kohl, has made many offers, but we have heard nothing back and this is disappointing," he said. Wilfried Sauerland, Abraham's promoter, issued a swift response. "We have received not one offer from the Sturm camp and the only offer in writing has been from us. The offer is still there because I would love to make the fight happen," Sauerland insisted. "I am certain that Arthur Abraham would win."

Promoter: **Universum-Box**
(6-30-07)
Brian Doogan

Evander Holyfield W 10 Lou Savarese

El Paso, Texas: They may have to change the slogan "Don't mess with Texas" to "Don't mess with Evander Holyfield in Texas," as the living legend won his fourth consecutive fight in his fourth different city in the Lone Star State, scoring two knockdowns to comfortably outpoint veteran Savarese. On the one hand, any 44-year-old winning any fight convincingly is a commendable athletic achievement. But looking at it with a critical eye, Savarese is himself 41 years old and was the perfect slow and easy to find opponent for "The Real Deal" to look good against. While Fres Oquendo stands out as the one foe on Holyfield's comeback trail that seemed prior to the fight to be a tough matchup for him, Savarese more closely resembled the likes of Vinny Maddalone and Jeremy Bates in terms of the minimal danger he presented to Holyfield.

Holyfield, 219, Atlanta, Georgia, remains a good puncher at his advanced age, and he hurt Savarese, 242, Houston, Texas, with a pair of right hands in the second round. But Savarese battled back in the third, stunning Holyfield with a right uppercut followed by a hard combination. The fourth round was all Holyfield, however. The former undisputed cruiserweight and heavyweight champ tagged Savarese with a lead right, and then moved him into the ropes with a pair of left hooks. A torrent of blows followed and Savarese could do little but cover up—and even that couldn't protect him from the chopping right that put him down on all fours. Savarese complained of a headbutt as referee Jesse Reyes (USA) began his count, which "Big Lou" easily beat.

The faster Holyfield remained in control most of the way after that, though Savarese had his moments in the sixth. Holyfield was extremely aggressive in the eighth, firing leaping left hooks in search of the kayo, but it was in the ninth that he momentarily looked like the Holyfield of old. With just a few seconds remaining in the round, The Real Deal dug a right to the body and then came up with a ferocious and lightning-fast

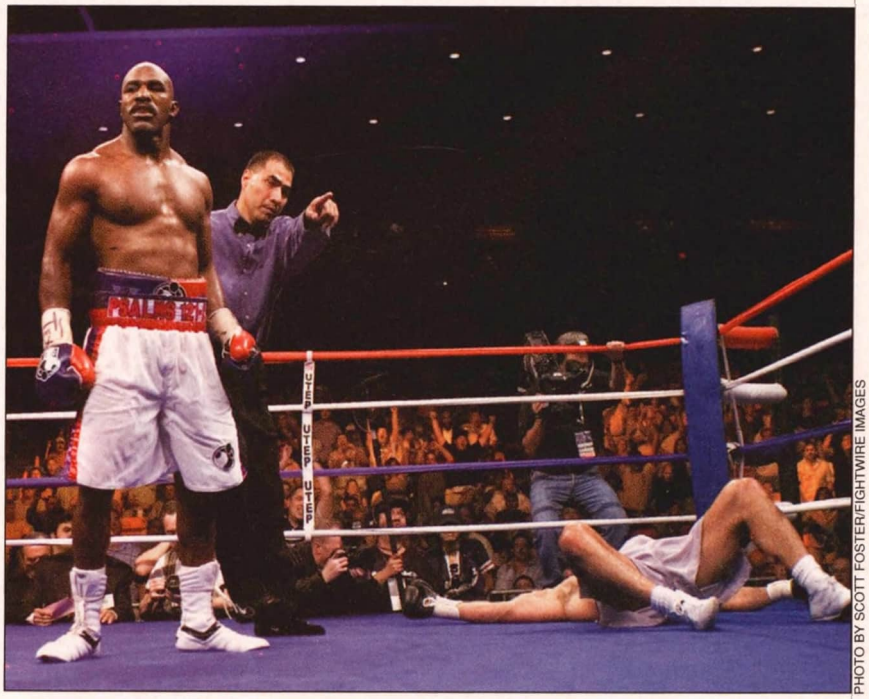


PHOTO BY SCOTT FOSTER/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Holyfield decks Savarese en route to entertaining win

left hook the jaw, putting Savarese down flat on his back. He somehow rose at the count of six and was saved by the bell. The 10th round featured more one-sided action in Holyfield's favor, though he never came particularly close to forcing a stoppage.

Judge Ray Hawkins (USA) scored it 99-87, Jerry Wright (USA) had it 98-90, and Glenn Rick Crocker (USA) tabbed it 96-91.

"Evander was a tough guy and I tried my best," said Savarese, 46-7 (38). "He caught me coming in a lot ... He's a good fighter."

"There's a lot of things I didn't do that I should have done," said Holyfield, 48-8-2 (27), being more critical of himself than most observers were. "I would say this was a '70' performance." We presume he was rating himself on a scale up to 100, not indicating the age he looked. If anything, he appeared a few years younger than he actually is.

Television: **Pay-Per-View**
Promoter: **Main Events**
(6-30-07)

Nate Campbell KO 6 Wilson Alcorro

Tampa, Florida: Rather than grow stale waiting for an alphabet title shot that he's already won two so-called "eliminators" to obtain, lightweight contender Campbell wisely decided to stay busy against southpaw Alcorro. At age 35, "The Galaxxy Warrior" doesn't have a lot of time to maximize his potential.

While the Colombian didn't pose much of a risk to Campbell's ranking, there was a definite possibility that his spoiling style would turn the bout into a stinker. The first round was very sloppy and featured far more misses and clinches than clean punching. The second was only marginally better, though Campbell did begin to dig to the body.

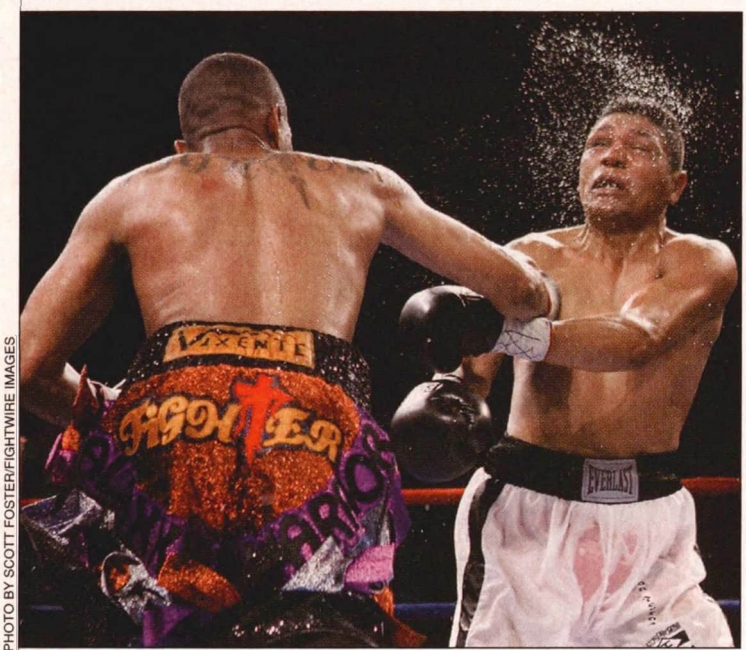


PHOTO BY SCOTT FOSTER/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Campbell stays sharp with kayo of Alcorra

Alcorro, 134½, enjoyed a brief spell of success in the third, when Campbell, 135, inexplicably lounged on the ropes and allowed his foe to pepper him with light punches. It was the only round the 33-year-old Alcorro won on THE RING's scorecard.

Action picked up in the fourth, when both stood their ground and worked hard on the inside, where Campbell connected with a few good rights to have his most productive round so far. Referee Jorge Alonso (USA) penalized Alcorro a point in the fifth for punching low, but despite the deduction, the Colombian was still reasonably competitive. That was to change dramatically in the following round.

In the sixth, Campbell quickly maneuvered into position and landed a hard right to Alcorro's chin. Before the stunned recipient could retreat or clinch, Campbell, 31-5-1 (25), held him in position with the crook of his left arm and delivered another right hand that connected flush a split second after the first.

Alcorro, 25-8-3 (17), went down in a heap and was counted out just 27 seconds into the round, much to the delight of Campbell's hometown fans at the Florida State Fairgrounds. It was the kind of emphatic ending that made you forget the untidy action that had preceded it. Whether or not it moves Campbell any closer to a title shot remains to be seen.

Promoter: **One-Punch Promotions**
Television: **ESPN2**
(7-6-07)

Sebastian Sylvester KO II Amin Asikainen

Zwickau, Germany: When this capable pair of European middleweights came together in June 2006, Asikainen, Siuntio, Finland, produced a stunning array of combination punches to stop Sylvester, Greifswald, Germany, in the eighth round of an all-action bout. The rematch was fought at the same ferocious pace, but this time Sylvester, 159½, prevailed when he floored Asikainen, 159, with two powerful right hands at the Stadthalle. It was Asikainen's fourth defense of the European 160-pound title.

Sylvester had managed to overcome defeat by the Finnish fighter by stopping Peter Mitrevski Jr. of Australia and Italy's Alessio Furlan, and he was confident that he could avenge his loss and move his career on. "I've shown that I learned from my defeat and I want to make up for it," he said. "I'm over it now, but I want the personal satisfaction of beating him." He was ahead narrowly on points in the first encounter when Asikainen landed a left hook to the jaw in the eighth round that prompted the fight to be stopped.

Asikainen, 21-1 (15), had kept busy with three wins in the interim and he began the rematch briskly, putting Sylvester on the canvas at the end of the opening round with a well-placed right, though Italian referee Giuseppe Quartarone did not rule a knockdown. "I became a bit complacent and overconfident after scoring the early knockdown," he reflected back in the dressing room. "I wasn't respectful enough of his punches and he was very

accurate throughout the fight."

It was another hard-fought and competitive encounter, and as the rounds wore on, neither fighter could gain a clear edge. Sylvester's speed was a telling factor and he landed with power, but Asikainen always responded with good punches, and the issue remained in doubt even after Sylvester decked Asikainen with a left hook in the seventh round.

The give and take continued over the following three rounds, but in the 11th, Sylvester, 26, landed a right to the jaw that put Asikainen, 31, down for a second time—though the referee *again* ruled a slip. Asikainen got up, but appeared to be in trouble, and another right hand by Sylvester, 26-2 (13), sent him crashing to the floor again. This time, Quartarone waved it over.

"I knew I was getting to him over the last few rounds and I just waited for my chance and took it," said Sylvester.

Promoter: **Wilfried Sauerland**
(6-23-07)
Brian Doogan

Wladimir Sidorenko KO 7 Jerome Arnould

Marseilles, France: With trademark combination punching and a clear edge in physical strength and experience, Sidorenko, 117½, Hamburg, Germany, via Energodar, Ukraine, encountered few problems against Arnould, 117½, Montpellier, France, before knocking out his opponent in the seventh round to retain the WBA bantamweight title at the Palais des Sports de Marseilles. It was the Ukrainian's fifth defense of a belt he won against Mexico's Julio Zarate in 2005.

Arnould, 14-3-1 (9), was game but just not in Sidorenko's class and this was apparent from the outset. Three bouts prior to stepping in the ring with Sidorenko, he had won via third-round stoppage over Adjib Guessab, a France-based Algerian whose record was 6-46-2 (1), and Arnould's two previous defeats came against nondescript opposition. Somehow he managed to earn a number-12 ranking by the WBA. Meanwhile, Sidorenko is tough and competent in the art of applying intense pressure, and Arnould was just not equipped to keep him off.

The Frenchman was pinned against the ropes for much of the first three rounds, and though he managed to evade some of the punches Sidorenko threw, he could not hope to withstand the onslaught. He was staggered in the fourth by a right-left combination to the jaw, and in the fifth Sidorenko floored him with another right to the jaw. Arnould got up at the count of eight, but the end was already in sight.

Somehow the challenger survived a punishing sixth round and even attempted to fire back at Sidorenko, 20-0-2 (7), but he got nailed by more damaging blows. Finally, in the seventh, Sidorenko, 30, applied the coup de grace, setting up his victim with a right hook that stunned him before another right hook put him down for the count of referee Julio C. Alvarado from Panama.

"I'm only 22 and I was fighting for a title. I'm proud that I managed to hang in there with him for as long as I did because he's a really good fighter," Arnould told Canal Plus TV in France.

Promoter: **AMI Production**
(6-29-07)
Brian Doogan

Herman Ngoudjo W 12 Randall Bailey

Montreal, Quebec: Some will remember this fight at Uniprix Stadium for the way the two junior welterweights rained punches upon each other over 12 rounds. But most will remember it for the way Mother Nature rained water on the entire crowd in the middle of the fight, causing a power outage, a brief delay, and a whole lot of soaking wet clothing. And Bailey has to hope people remember the controversial nature of the decision, and not just the official result, as he probably deserved the close nod that went local fighter Ngoudjo's way.

The alphabet eliminator got off to a stirring start, with the combatants trading knockdowns in the first two rounds. The powerpunching Bailey, 140, Miami, Florida, was doing well in the opener until Ngoudjo, 139½, Montreal via Douala, Cameroon, scored with a right to the body and a crackling left hook to the head, knocking Bailey backward, off-balance, and eventually down. Referee Marlon Wright (Canada) only reached the count of two before Bailey was up and ready to engage. He evened the score in round two, when he caught Ngoudjo coming in with a left hook to the jaw. The Cameroonian-Canadian was spun around by the blow and his left glove touched the canvas, earning him an eight-count.

The fighters continued opening up over the ensuing rounds—and in the fourth, the sky joined in, opening up and drenching those patrons not covered by the canopy over the ring. Early in the fifth, the torrential downpour led to a loss of electrical power. The stadium was dark for about two minutes before the power came back on and Bailey and Ngoudjo were

PHOTO BY BORIS HORVAT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Sidorenko (right) was too strong and too experienced for Arnould

able to again display their own power.

During most of the middle rounds, Bailey, 32, was making the fight, landing long right hands while Ngoudjo fought defensively. A couple of right crosses in round nine seemed to affect the 27-year-old Ngoudjo. But the local fighter rallied in the late rounds, just when it seemed he had perhaps fallen too far behind to win. He backed up Bailey, 35-6 (32), in the 11th with two hard jabs and a right cross to the jaw and closed strongly in the final round with more three-punch combinations.

Though Ngoudjo's late rally only served to pull him close on THE RING's scorecard, which read 114-113 for Bailey, it separated him from Bailey as the winner on two judges' cards. William Ray (USA) had Bailey in front 115-112, but Robert Hoyle (USA) saw it 115-112 for Ngoudjo, and Richard Decarufel (Canada) scored 114-112, Ngoudjo.

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIREIMAGES.COM

The "Ding-A-Ling Man" rings Nwodo's bell

Ngoudjo, 16-1 (9), is now the mandatory challenger for 140-pound beltholder Paulie Malignaggi, with the fight likely to be enforced by year's end.

Television: **ESPN2**
Promoter: **GYM Promotions**
(6-8-07)

Darnell Wilson KO 11 Emmanuel Nwodo

Staten Island, New York: When power-punching Wilson enters the ring, he should be wearing a sign that reads, "Engage At Your Own Risk." Fellow cruiser Nwodo was the latest victim to learn that lesson too late, as "The Ding-A-Ling Man" starched him with one mammoth left hook to rally from behind and take the USBA cruiserweight title at the St. George Theatre. It was the first fight card in Staten Island in nine years, hosted by the Teddy Atlas Foundation, whose leader was there to provide the ESPN2 *Friday Night Fights* commentary.

Nwodo, 33, 198½, Baltimore, Maryland, via Nigeria, gave Wilson, 32, 198, Takoma Park, Maryland, problems all night when he kept the shorter man on the end of his long jab. Wilson's own jab was virtually nonexistent. When he did throw it, it was a pawing thrust with little commitment. But in addition to having sledgehammer power, Wilson has a concrete chin, so it was up to Nwodo to stick and move for the full 12. Unfortunately, at those times when the African could not help himself and chose to slug, he paid dearly for his folly.

The first time occurred in the third round, when Wilson was close enough to score a knockdown with a short left hook that had Nwodo grabbing onto Wilson's legs as he melted to the canvas. Nwodo survived the round by staying away for the duration. By then a nasty cut caused by an accidental headbutt in round two began causing Ding-A-Ling noticeable discomfort. He was blinking frequently as blood ran down from the outside of his left eye. Nwodo, too, had a cut, and though it was not as severe, his left eye was beginning to close.

After the early rounds, it became a battle of attrition, which Nwodo appeared to be winning. He managed sporadic combinations in the middle rounds, while Wilson appeared discouraged and lethargic. The sparse crowd voiced its displeasure after six minutes of inactivity in the sixth and seventh. Nwodo stepped it up in the eighth and ninth; he jabbed and threw double left hooks at Wilson, who followed his foe, unable to cut off the ring and reach him with slow roundhouse blows.

But, typical of a Wilson fight, one punch can change everything, and in the 10th, it did. Nwodo got too close, and as he bent down, negating his own height advantage, Wilson countered him with a short right that stunned the Nigerian. A quick, short follow-up left put Nwodo on his behind. Nwodo rose, but spent the remainder of the round running. He never recovered completely.

Wilson went out for the 11th like a wolf after a wounded caribou, and, like Icarus, Nwodo once again flew too close to the sun. Wilson melted Nwodo's waxy feathers early in the round with a hard left hook to the head, and then pounded Nwodo all over the ring with rights and lefts. Just when The Ding-A-Ling Man appeared to have punched himself out with Nwodo on the ropes, he took a step back and unloaded a nuclear-powered left hook to Nwodo's face. Nwodo was so separated from his senses that his body pinned his own legs underneath him as he fell down and out. Referee David Fields (USA) did not even bother to count. It was all over at 2:00 mark of the 11th. The victorious Wilson, 22-5-3 (19), was so exhausted he crawled to a neutral corner where he rested his head on the turnbuckle. It was the Knockout of the Year so far. Nwodo, 21-4 (17), was on his back for about 10 minutes before being helped onto a stool.

All three judges had Nwodo ahead, 95-93, at the time of the stoppage. THE RING had Nwodo ahead, 96-92.

"I had nothing left," said Wilson afterward. Luckily for him, his tank did not empty one punch too soon. Quickly becoming a fan favorite, Wilson now deserves a shot at a cruiser title. The question is whether real champion Jean-Marc Mormeck or any other beltholder wants to deal with his fists.

Promoter: **Duva Boxing**
(6-29-07)
Mike Greenhill ■

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New Faces

(Continued from Page 28)

"So they put me in the ring with this guy and I stopped him, and Emanuel [Steward] said, 'He did pretty good. Keep coming back.' So I just kept coming and coming and I started picking up things real quick, and it went from there."

Where it went was on to a very brief amateur career, since the Hearns camp was well aware of how critical the element of time was going to be due to Ronald's age. After 10 amateur fights and a 9-1 record, Ronald made his pro debut on April 2, 2004, against Alex Black at the Joe Louis Arena in Detroit. He stopped Black in the first round, and did the same to Philip Trosclair seven weeks later.

By his fourth fight, at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas against Darren Foss, Ronald was under the tutelage of his uncle, Billy Hearns, and Henry Hill. Hill, who helped train his father and remembers Ronald as a child, continues to work with the younger Hearns and describes him as having "crazy power like his daddy."

"His best tool is his jab and his one-two combination," said Hill, who worked in Florida with Silver Hawk Boxing for a couple of years before moving back to Detroit. "He's got a solid jab, he's got a solid right hand, and so his best thing is a double-jab right hand. He's got a good hook and he goes to the body very well. There are a lot of different things people are saying about this kid, but he's still learning."

Partially because of his last name and partially because of the current state of the middleweight division, Hearns has yet to fight what many would consider to be a high-caliber opponent. His first-round knockout of Daniel Neal in January drew a chorus of boos because it looked like the 40-year-old went down too easily. Even Ronald seemed frustrated at Neal's lack of effort.

Hill believes that by 2008, with the right competition in the ring, Ronald will be ready to challenge some of the

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Hearns connects with a left en route to a unanimous eight-round decision over Dennis Sharpe on the Taylor-Spinks card in Memphis, Tennessee. Like his famous father, Ronald has a lanky physique and a big punch, knocking out 11 of his first 14 pro opponents.

top-ranked middleweights, but the elder Hearns has a different timetable in mind.

"I think he needs more than 14 or 15 professional fights, closer to 25 or 26 fights, before he is able to take the next step and move on," said Hearns. "He needs to learn more about boxing. An amateur career is what grounds you into the sport and gets you ready for the intricacies of the game."

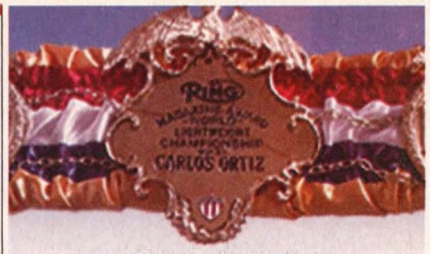
Hill told Hearns' promoters at Di-Bella Entertainment that he would like the next opponent to be a step above Dennis Sharpe, the fighter Ronald beat by unanimous decision on May 19 in Memphis, on the Jermain Taylor-Cory Spinks undercard.

Ronald, who still looks back to his only loss at the Michigan Amateur Finals to Anthony Dirrell as a turning point, also is realistic about where he stands at this point. Dirrell was the first southpaw Ronald ever faced and he recalls Dirrell telling him that by going the distance, he had a bright future ahead of him.

"I haven't been in there with a real veteran fighter. When you get in with a veteran fighter, you've got to really be on your game because they're kind of crafty and tricky," Hearns said. "So once I test the waters in that area and dominate those guys, then I'm ready for whatever comes my way."

Hill has always advised Hearns to make his last name work for him and to "take it and run with it," but Ronald wants to create his own identity. Hill still marvels at how some of the things Ronald does in the ring resemble Thomas without Ronald even realizing it.

"I'm very proud of my son for taking the route I wanted him to take, for getting an education, and that's what I'm mostly proud of my son for," said the elder Hearns. "Not just because he's boxing. I did not want him to box, but now that he's chosen to box, I'll support him because everything's right." ■



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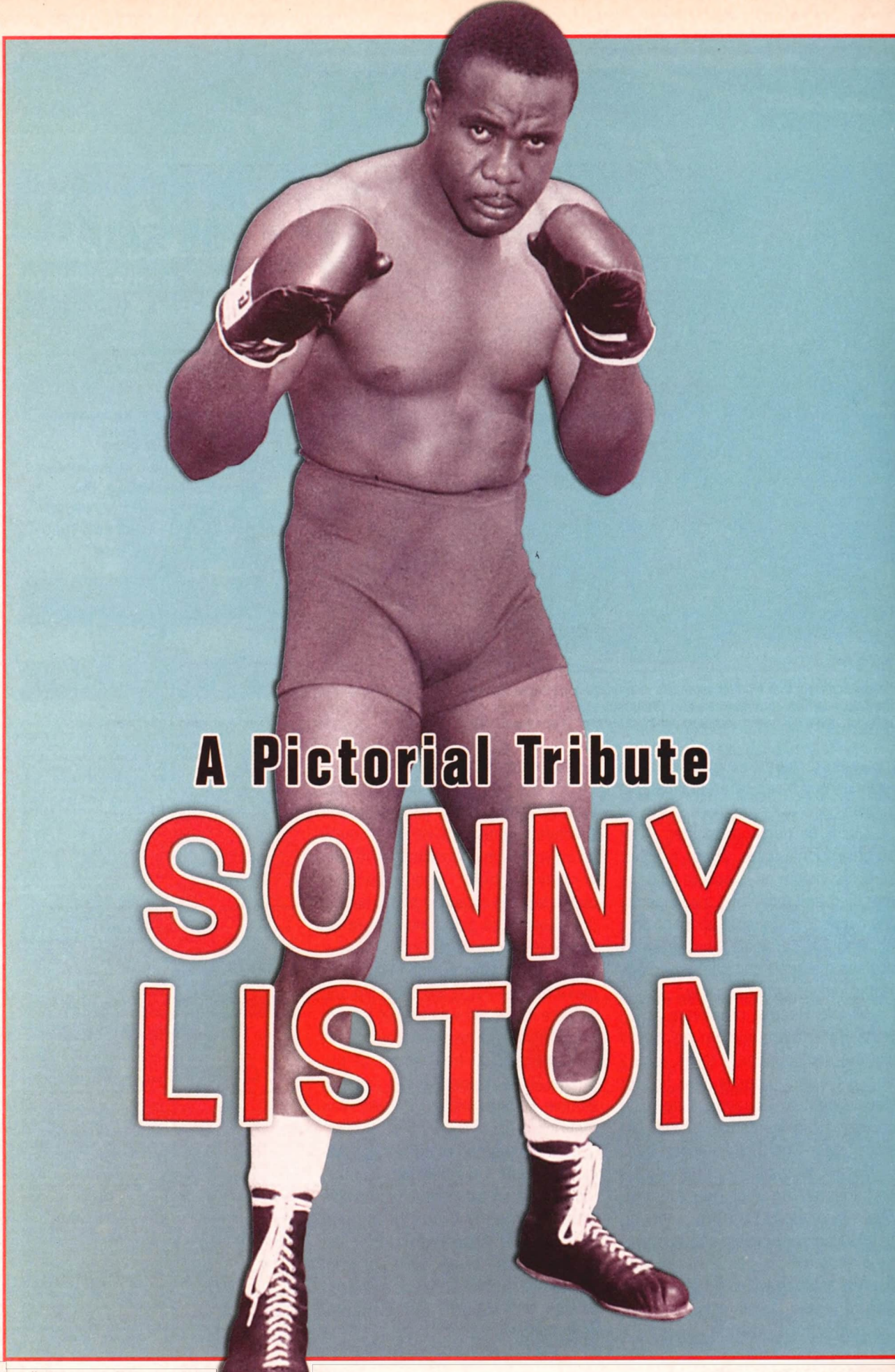
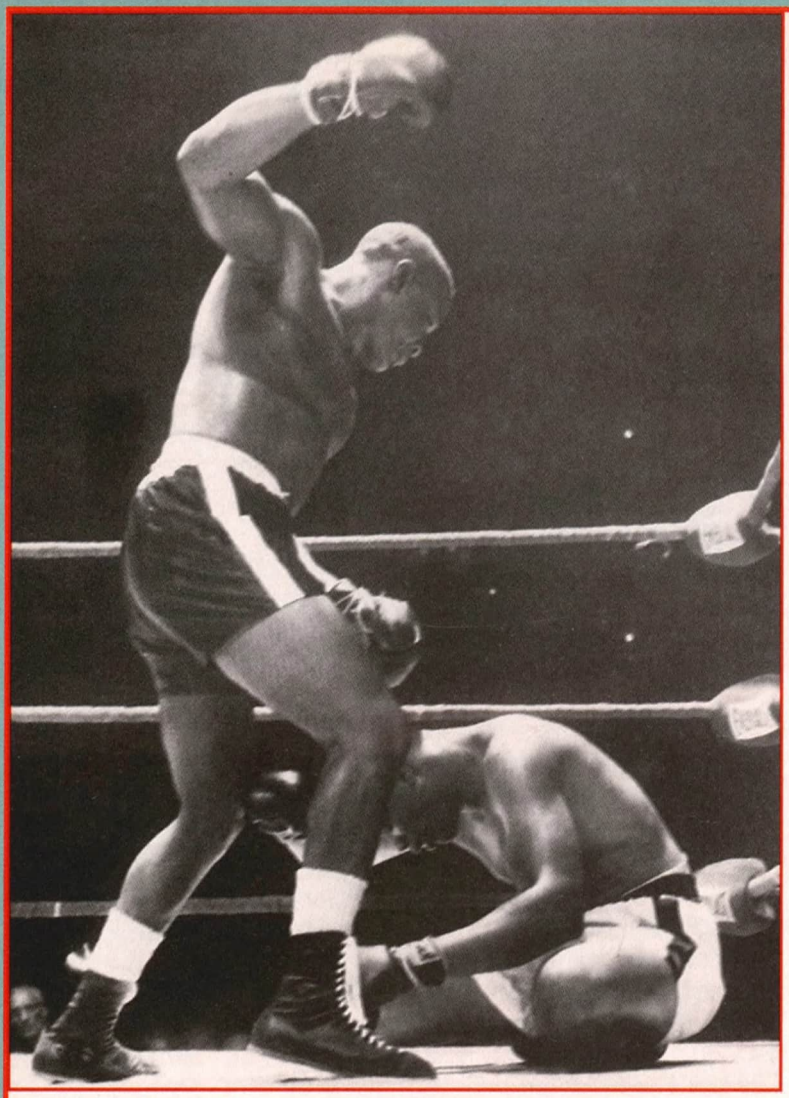


A Pictorial Tribute

SONNY LISTON

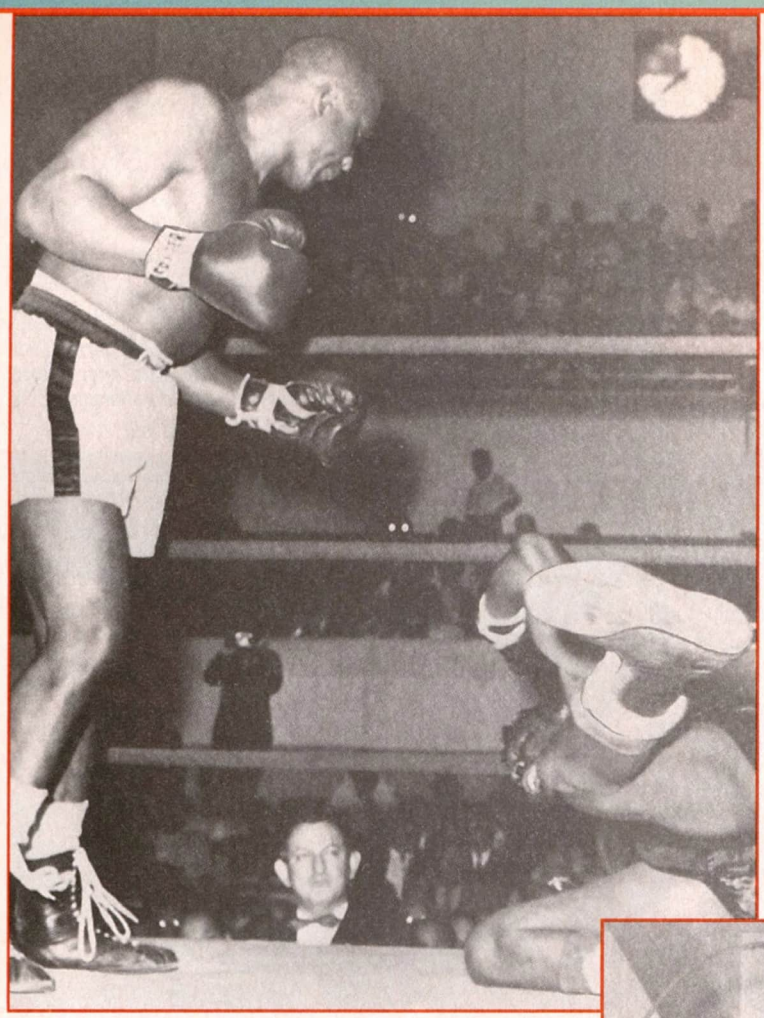
Birthdate: *May 8, 1932*
Date of Death: *December 30, 1970*
Weight Class: *Heavyweight*
Height: *6'1"*
Professional Record: *50-4 (39)*
Title: *World heavyweight (September 25, 1962-February 25, 1964)*
Best Performances: *Floyd Patterson (KO 1, KO 1), Zora Folley (KO 3), Cleveland Williams (KO 3, KO 2), Eddie Machen (W 12), Roy Harris (KO 1), Mike DeJohn (KO 6)*
Year of IBHOF Induction: *1991*

Background: The son of an Arkansas sharecropper and one of 24 brothers and sisters, Liston was one of the most feared and misunderstood of heavyweight champions ... Moved to St. Louis in his early-teens, where street life eventually led to a conviction for armed robbery and a stint at the Missouri State Prison ... Learned to box while incarcerated, and after being paroled won the 1953 National Golden Gloves ... Turned pro in September '53 and won 14 of his first 15 bouts before being sent back to prison for assaulting a police officer ... Returned to action in '58 and reeled off eight consecutive victories, six by knockout. Followed with four more kayos in '59 to establish himself as heavyweight champion Floyd Patterson's leading contender ... Patterson's manager, Cus D'Amato, used Liston's ties to organized crime as an excuse to avoid him for several years, but when they finally fought in September '62, Patterson was knocked out in the first round ... A rematch with Patterson the next year netted the same result in what proved to be Liston's only successful title defense ... Liston entered February '64 title fight with upstart Cassius Clay as a prohibitive favorite, but lost the championship via TKO when he failed to answer the bell for the seventh round ... A rematch the following year ended in a first-round knockout defeat for Liston in a bout marred by controversy. Many thought Liston took a dive, while others believed it was a legitimate kayo ... The ex-champ continued boxing for the next six years, winning 15 of 16 bouts, but could never obtain another shot at the title. His final fight was a 10th-round TKO of Chuck Wepner in June '70, and he was still technically an active fighter when he died at his Las Vegas home on New Years Eve of that year. The official cause of death was lung congestion and heart failure, but many believe he died from an overdose of heroine, perhaps administered by organized crime figures ... Despite his gruff demeanor and criminal record, Liston seemed more a man trapped by his past than a truly bad individual. Due to his antihero persona and menacing fighting style, Liston has retained a significant cult following and was the subject of a 1995 HBO documentary and a 2000 biography, titled *The Devil And Sonny Liston,* by Nick Tosches. In 2004, rock guitarist Mark Knopfler wrote and recorded a tribute called "A Song For Sonny Liston."

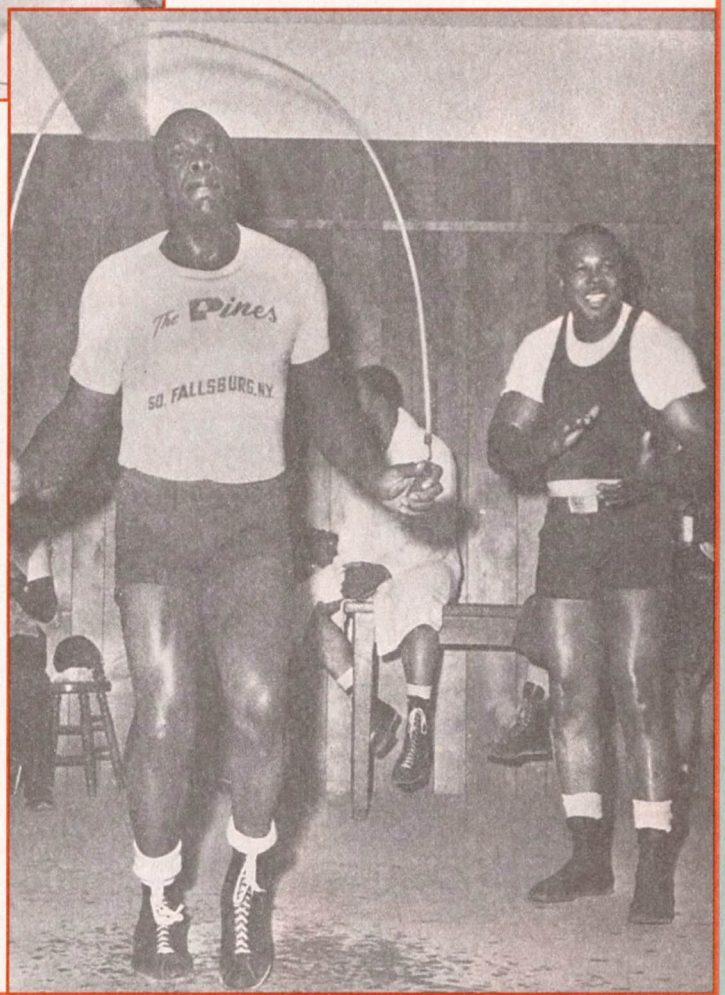


An ominous-looking Liston impassively bludgeons Nino Valdes to the canvas for a third-round knockout in August 1959. This was one of a string over overpowering knockouts that built Liston's reputation as a virtually unstoppable force.

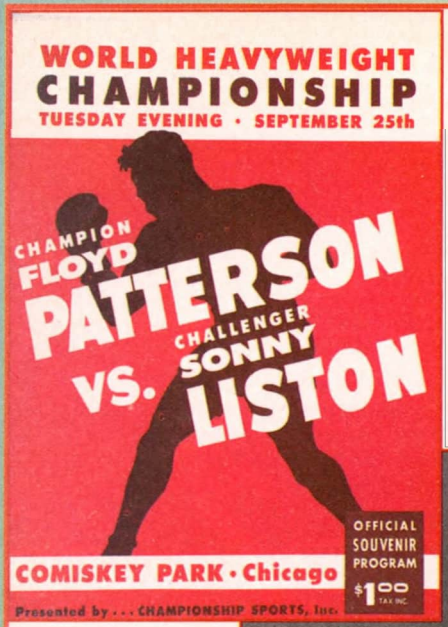
Liston had already beaten fellow knockout artist Cleveland Williams the previous years, and the "Big Cat" lasted one less round in the 1959 rematch, getting starched at the 2:23 mark of the second round of a bout held in Williams' home state of Texas.



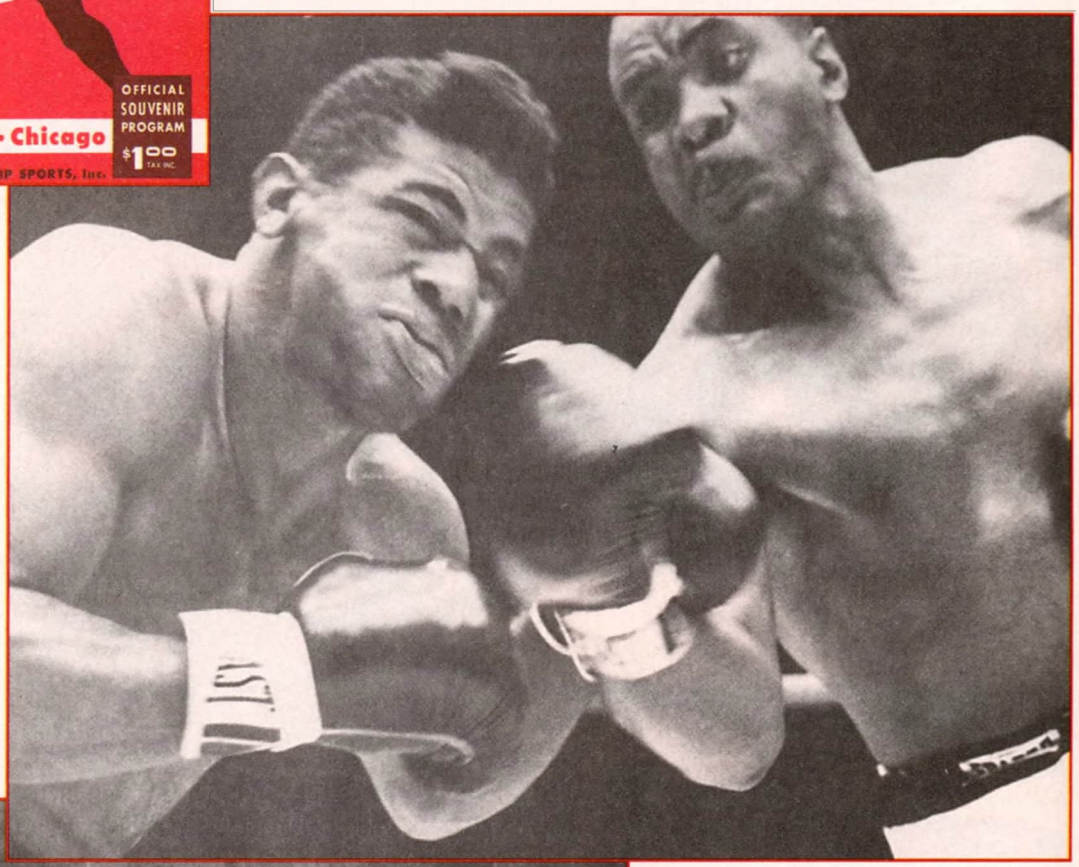
Howard King crashes down in the second round of his March 1961 bout with Liston in Miami Beach. The next round Liston finished the job, and two fights later he won the heavyweight title.

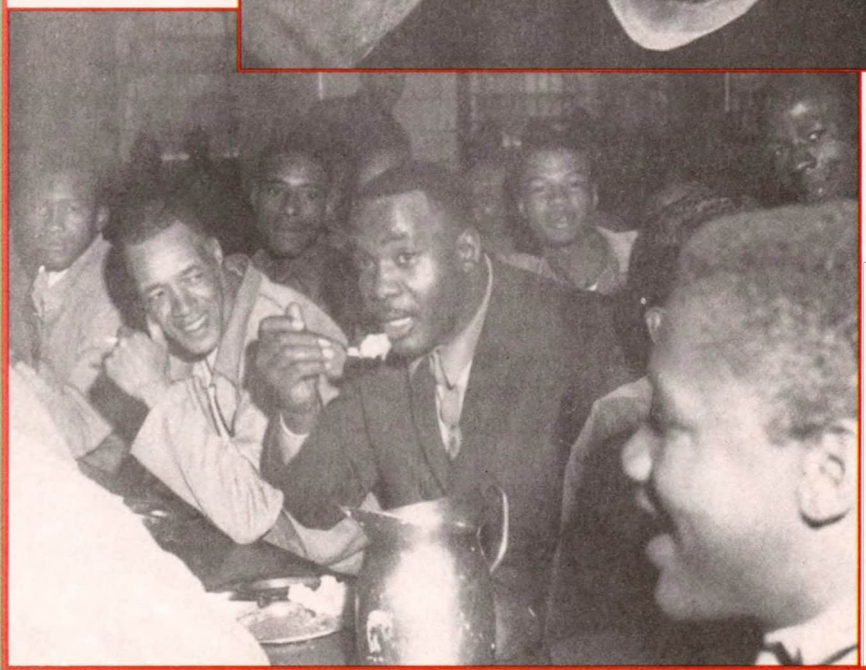


Liston jumps rope to the tune "Night Train," while prepping for his title shot against Floyd Patterson. That's Archie Moore in the background, clapping his hands along with the beat.



Patterson samples Liston's right hand during their 1962 title fight in Chicago. Seconds later, Liston uncorked a left hook that flattened Patterson for the 10-count at 2:06 of the very first round.

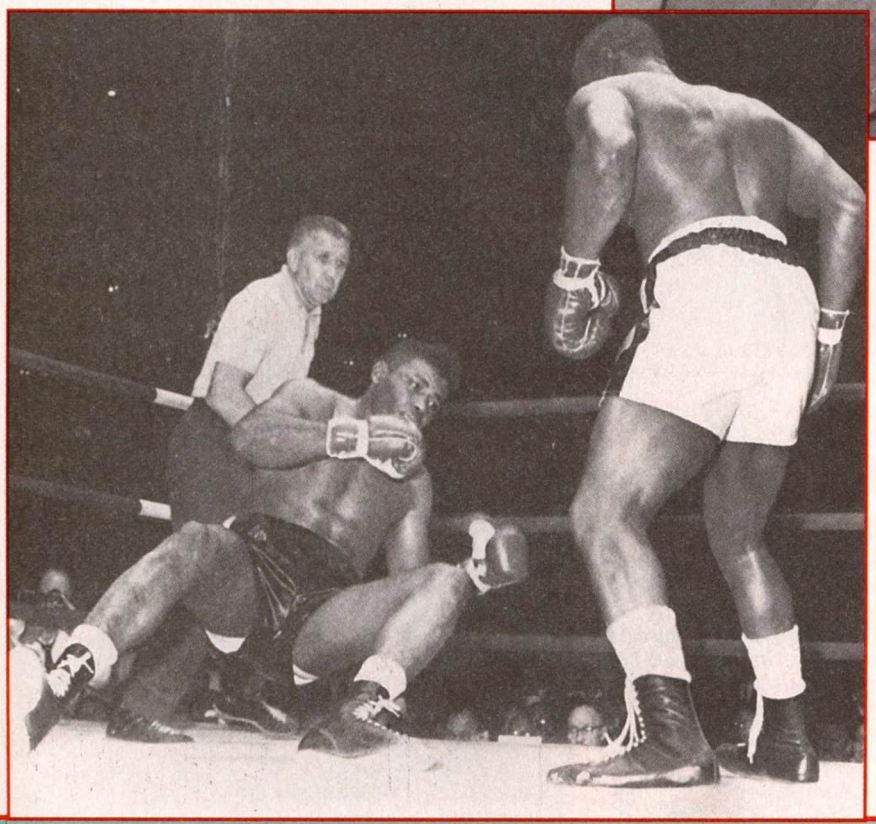




Back where it all began: Not long after winning the heavyweight title, Liston visited his old stomping grounds at the Missouri State Prison in Jefferson City, where he has lunch with some of the inmates.

As his title-winning year drew to a close, Liston and his wife, Geraldine, get ready for Christmas by decorating their new home on Chicago's south side.

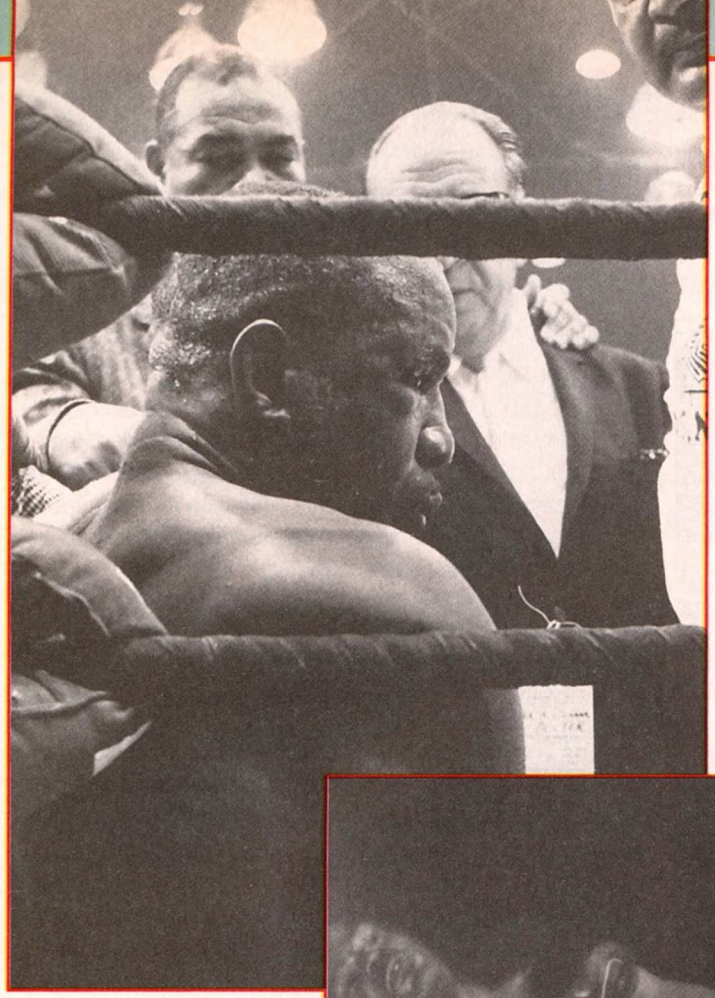
Nat Fleischer, editor and publisher of THE RING, presents Liston with his heavyweight championship belt in Las Vegas, where Liston was training for his rematch with Patterson.



The second Patterson fight was practically a carbon copy of the first, as Patterson never made it out of the first round. At that point in his career, Liston, who twice brushed Patterson aside with contemptuous ease, was considered virtually unbeatable.

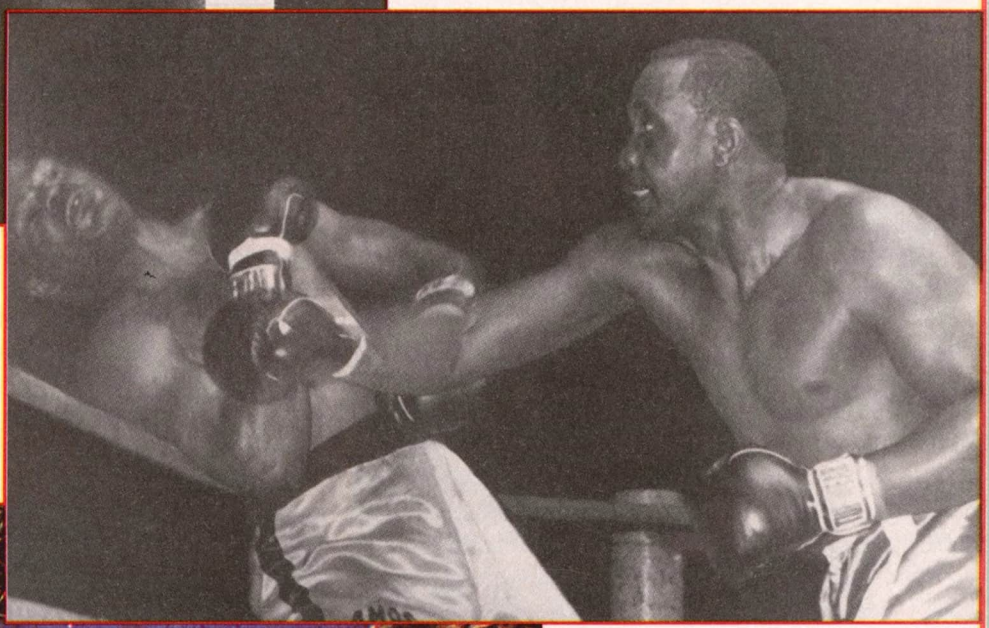
A confident Liston gives the victory sign during his prefight medical examination prior to the first fight with Cassius Clay. Little did Sonny realize that his reign as heavyweight champion was about to end.

His stock at an all-time high following the second kayo of Patterson, Liston went on a European tour, where he mounted a horse in Newcatle-on-Tyne, England, for canter down the main street. That's Liston's trainer, Willie Reddish, directly behind the bloke leading the horse.



A defeated and dispirited Liston sits slumped on his stool after refusing to answer the bell for the seventh round of his fight with Clay. Although he claimed to have injured his shoulder, the real reason Liston quit remains a matter of conjecture.

The comeback trail: The still-dangerous Liston bombs Amos "Big Train" Lincoln with a right hand en route to a second-round knockdown in December 1968. The ex-champ would engage in five more bouts before his mysterious death two years later.



End of the line: Liston is buried at the Paradise Memorial Gardens in Las Vegas.

PHOTO BY TEDDY BLACKBURN

THE RING Flashback

Through the years with "The Bible of Boxing"

April 1968

COVER STORY: Other than the logo, date, and price there is no type on the cover, just an illustration of Buster Mathis and Joe Frazier by Leroy Neiman. Moreover, there is no article specifically previewing the upcoming Frazier-Mathis bout. Therefore, technically, there is no cover story.

World Champions

(for period ended February 20, 1968)
Heavyweight: Cassius Clay
Light Heavyweight: Dick Tiger
Middleweight: Emile Griffith
Welterweight: Curtis Cokes
Junior Welterweight: Paul Fujii
Lightweight: Carlos Ortiz
Junior Lightweight: Hiroshi Kobayashi
Featherweight: vacant
Bantamweight: Fighting Harada
Flyweight: Chartchai Chionoi

"Specter Of Clay Haunts Heavy Situation" by Associate Editor Daniel M. Daniel is a well-considered and even-handed analysis of the muddled heavyweight situation. Although THE RING obstinately refused to call him Muhammad Ali, the magazine continued to recognize Ali as the heavyweight champion, a progressive stance, especially as he had already been convicted of a felony for refusing induction into the U.S. Armed Forces and was an unpopular figure with many Americans.

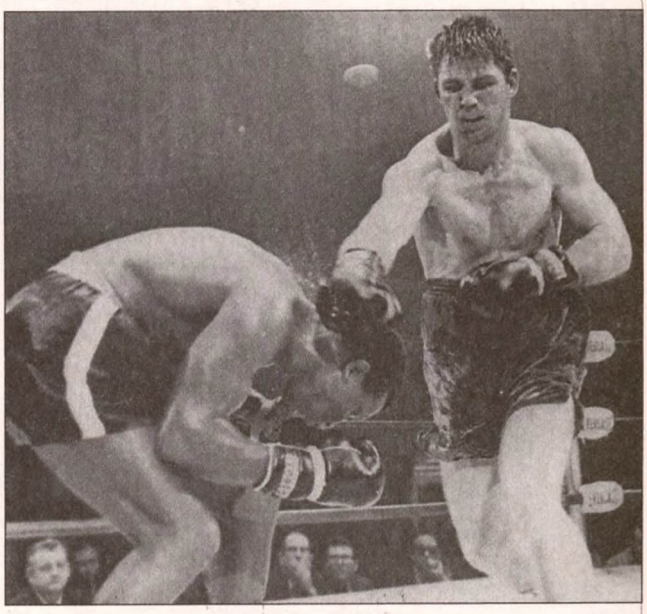
"This publication still recognizes Clay as the world heavyweight champion and will continue to maintain that position while there is a chance that courts will reverse the original outcome," wrote Daniel.

The rest of the boxing establishment, however, was in a hurry to crown a new champ. Jerry Quarry had just stopped Thad Spencer as part of the WBA tournament and would soon be matched with Jimmy Ellis for the alphabet belt. Meanwhile, Joe Frazier and Buster Mathis were getting ready to fight for the New York State Athletic Commission's version of the title.

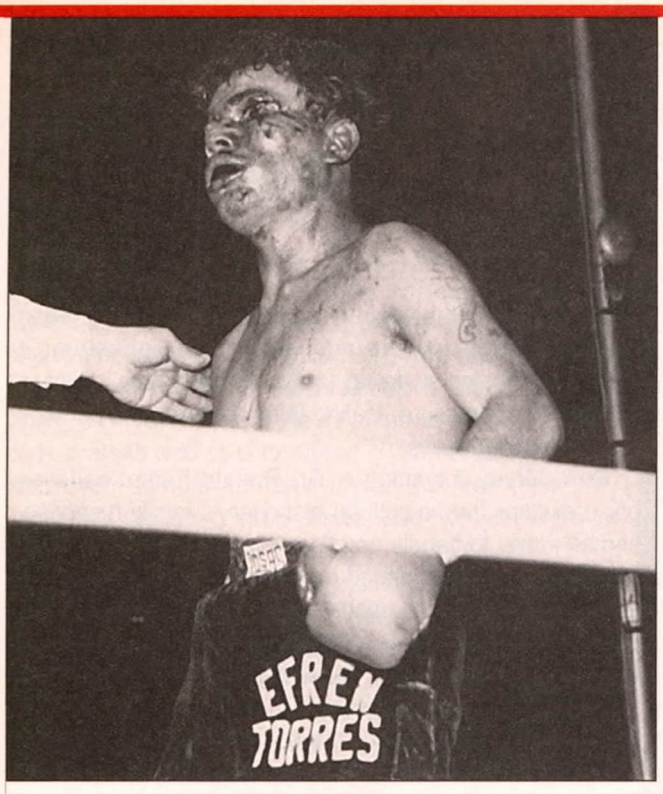
Daniel was openly contemptuous of the notion that either the Quarry-Ellis or Frazier-Mathis bouts were for the legitimate heavyweight title.

In a fascinating sidebar, part of the transcript of Ali's trial was published. Some may be surprised by the answer Ali gave when questioned about his famous statement that he had no quarrel with the Viet Cong.

"This was a few years ago, yes, sir," said Ali. "At the time I



Quarry en route to 12th-round knockout of Spencer in WBA tournament



Severe eye cut ends Torres' flyweight title bid

was wrong. I admit saying that, but it was out of place, but I did say it."

Of course, history would prove that THE RING's position was correct, when the U.S. Supreme Court eventually reversed Ali's conviction, paving the way for him to resume his boxing career.

"Chionoi-Torres Set For Encore After Bloody Mexican Battle" was Nat Fleischer's account of flyweight champion Chartchai Chionoi's 13th-round TKO of local hero Efren Torres in the Mexico City bullring.

"It was a battle loaded with spectacular fighting," wrote Fleischer, "one of the best in the lower divisions I've seen in years, a bloody glove-to-glove affair that kept the howling Sunday gathering of 18,000 on their feet to the finish."

Torres staggered Chionoi in a number of rounds and came close to stopping the champion from Thailand in the seventh and 11th rounds. But it was far from a one-sided encounter, and the Mexican was dropped in the second and severely cut over the right eye in the same round. The wound finally forced American referee Arthur Mercante to stop the fight on the advice of the ringside doctor. "It was the most savage fight I have refereed," said Mercante.

They fought again the following year, with Torres taking the title via eighth-round knockout, but when they held a rubber match in Bangkok in 1970, Chionoi regained the title with a 15-round decision.

"Tiger Being Stalked By Determined Foster" by Bob Goodman, describes Bob Foster's road to a title bout with light heavyweight champion Dick Tiger.

"My manager has offered Tiger a guarantee of $75,000," said Foster, who also revealed that the biggest purse he had earned so far was $5,700 for his 12-round decision over Henry Hank in 1965.

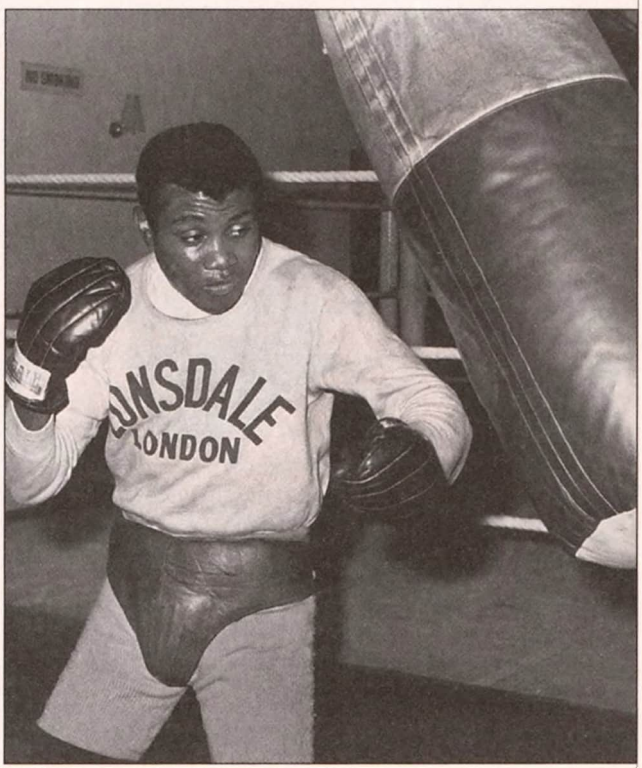
Foster got his shot in May of that year, knocking out Tiger in the fourth round, which was the start of a reign that would last until 1974 and include 14 successful defenses.

"European Gossip" by J. A. Tree highlights two European title bouts: Jose Legra's third-round knockout of Frenchman Yves Desmarets to win the European featherweight crown in front 14,000 fans in Madrid, Spain, and heavyweight Karl Mildenberger's grueling 15-round decision over Gerhard Zeck in Berlin.

Mildenberger, two years past his fight with Muhammad Ali, "was forced to take more punishment than in any of his previous 59 bouts" and was clearly on the skids. He fought twice more, losing to Leotis Martin and Henry Cooper, and then retired. Legra, on the other hand, would go on to win the WBC featherweight belt in July, lose it in '69, and eventually win the world 126-pound championship in '72.

"Southpaw Al Jones Drops Heavy Bombs" by Hank Kaplan hypes the Florida heavyweight who was promoted and managed by the team of Chris and Angelo Dundee, respectively.

A former high school football star, Jones took up boxing after suffering a knee injury that put an end to his gridiron career. Although Jones was on a lengthy winning run when this article was published and eventually drew with Zora Folley and kayoed Cleveland Williams, he retired in '76 with a 32-3-3 (18) record without ever getting a title shot. ■



Legra, a Cuban based in Spain, pounds the heavybag in London

By Margaret Goodman, M.D.

Can You Feel My Pain?

Pain is a necessary evil in boxing. The word "pain" comes from the Latin, *poema*, meaning punishment, a fine, or penalty. The Association for the Study of Pain defines it as "an unpleasant sensory and emotional (conscious) experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage." We each have a threshold for when a noxious stimulus becomes intolerable, but do boxers feel pain like the rest of us, or do they have an innate or learned ability to fight through it?

There are biochemical, physiologic, psychological, and philosophical aspects to pain.

Nocieceptors (pain receptors) are nerve endings that look like branches of a bush. They exist on our skin and on bone or joint surfaces. Biochemical signals from these nocieceptors are sent through the spinal cord to the brainstem and then to the brain. While our central nervous system helps us distinguish between pleasant and unpleasant sensations, pain is part of our defense system. It serves as an indicator of a potential injury, encourages a person to cease a task, and can promote healing by prompting someone to refrain from activity.

Whether or not the pain is consciously perceived, when a fighter is hit hard he may experience physiologic changes including sweating, a slowed heart rate, pallor, a drop in blood pressure, feeling faint, nausea, and perhaps loss of consciousness.

New Jersey Psychiatrist Dr. Ronald Kamm believes pain develops from a cultural response, a family response, and as a way to handle emotion. It is similar to adopting a stoic expression. Childhood experiences, heredity, cultural attitudes, and gender each contribute as to how pain is perceived. Kamm notes, "In general, highly trained athletes have a higher pain threshold. When marathon runners 'hit the wall,' they dissociate. They *leave* the pain."

Dr. Barry Cole, director of education for the American Academy of Pain Management, disagrees. He believes that one thing that hurts one human will hurt another. "Tolerance of pain is another matter," he said. "That will be more motivational." Mental toughness enabling a fighter to stay focused may modulate pain's perceived severity.

Both agree there is a difference in athletes that choose contact sports. They have the constitution, upbringing, and experience to endure pain. Dr. Kamm notes, "One of my patients, a professional boxer, had a parent who would pinch him to become accustomed to pain over time. It was utilized as a teaching technique to develop his son into a championship boxer."

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

McCullough (right) fights through the pain against Oscar Larios

Boxers may experience pain as another adversary that needs to be beaten, or they make it their ally. A fighter will say, "He's going to react to the pain, but I am not." The boxer will focus on the fight and strategy, and use the pain as a call to action. That shift in focus makes the pain less distracting.

No one would argue that former WBC bantamweight titleholder Wayne McCullough has felt pain. His first and

most memorable painful experience came in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. His left cheekbone was injured in the semifinals. He experienced numbness and minor swelling along the left side of his nose and lip.

"I had 36 hours before the finals," recalled McCullough. "No one really noticed I was hurt. The doctors just concentrated on my hands. Then, I fought Joel Casamayor. He hit me with the perfect shot. Blood from my cheek came out of the corner of my eye. It was like someone had taken an electric cable to my face. I went back to my corner, and they wanted to stop the fight. I took a stand and said to myself, *I am not going to give up.* I went through the pain to win the final round. My bone was broken in three places, and I couldn't fight for seven months."

McCullough considers his upbringing responsible for his toughness and success. "Growing up in Belfast the way I did, I was a man at age five. You are fighting for everything. These are the things I think about when I am in a fight. In 1999, Erik Morales hit me hard through an entire 12 rounds, but I thought about where I came from. That is my make-up in having a good chin, the determination, and the will to keep fighting."

Dr. Kamm agrees that a fighter's painful childhood experiences can teach them to ignore pain and minimize its effects.

McCullough notes that tolerating pain is what separates a world-class fighter from a world champion. "Both guys are hurting in a fight," he said. "You know when your opponent is hurting and vice versa, but the world champion is able to fight through it." He was impressed with Zab Judah's recent performance against Miguel Cotto. "Judah," he said, "showed guts and heart and took a pounding."

The inability to tolerate punishment is often responsible for a boxer's retirement. According to McCullough, "A lot of guys become a world champion and they disappear. They just don't want to get hit anymore."

Pain can be treated by methods other than medications. The act of smiling has been found to release endorphins. Endorphins are naturally produced biochemical compounds released into the circulation by the brain's pituitary gland. They bind to neurons (nerve cells), and act as opiates (narcotics). As a result, pain signals do not reach the brain. It is not uncommon to see a fighter smile in the ring after he takes a punishing blow. While we as fans may interpret this as a sign of defiance, Dr. Kamm theorizes that this simple reaction is an unconscious attempt by a boxer to release endorphins to minimize the hurt.

A component of pain is how much someone is willing to absorb. According to Dr. Kamm, some runners *become the pain.* An athlete may say, "Okay, give it to me and let's see how much I can take. I am going to inflict pain on him, and he is going to react, but I am not going to let myself react." In this way they gain success in rising above the discomfort.

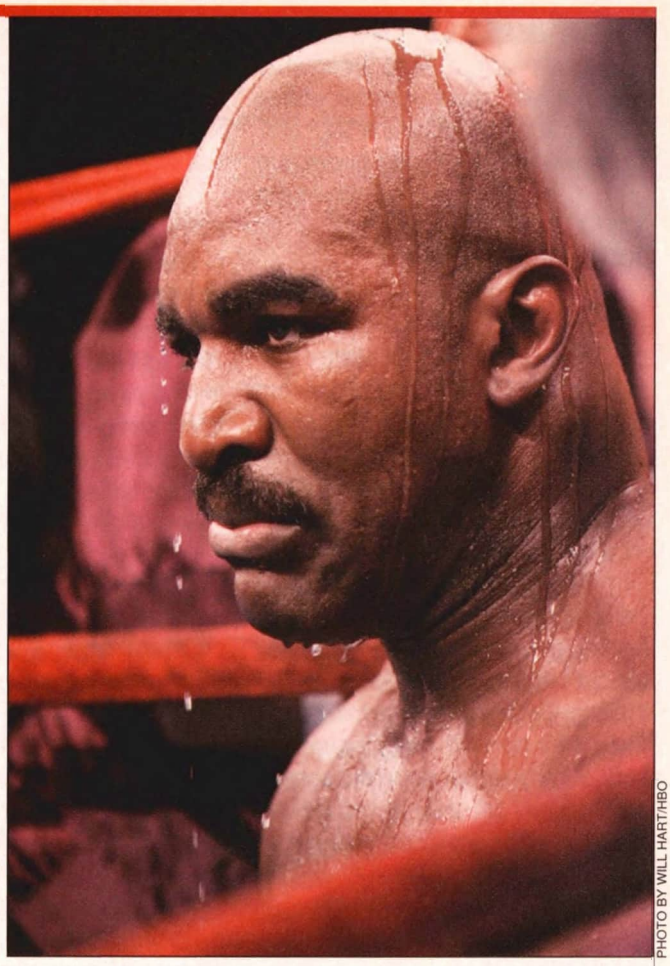


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Holyfield says great fighters have to endure pain

McCullough emphasizes his need to feel pain in training. He finds this especially important if a boxer hasn't competed in some time. While he recognizes no one should get beaten up in the gym, he admits the need to prepare for pain. "I wear fight gloves and allow myself to get hit, sometimes by a welterweight," he said. "This makes me prepared and sharpens me up. I want to feel that. Otherwise you go into a fight with a false sense of security."

Conceptually, it is difficult to determine what constitutes pain, but philosophers have dealt with this question for centuries. Some define it by its cause, while others characterize it spiritually as something that provides growth, compassion, and understanding as it is overcome. Nineteenth century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger."

Years ago, former undisputed heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield, when asked what makes a great fighter, responded, "You must be able to endure the pain."

Whether a boxer compartmentalizes the existence of pain during a bout or identifies it as a call to action against his opponent, surpassing pain is a necessary attribute a boxer requires in order to succeed. ■

Come Out Writing

Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Send your comments to Come Out Writing, THE RING, P.O. Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034.

Or e-mail letters to comeoutwriting@yahoo.com. E-mailed letters will include the writer's e-mail address unless a city and state of origin is provided.

The Next Superfight?

I'm writing to ask THE RING to begin pushing for the next superfight: Floyd Mayweather vs. Sugar Shane Mosley. The fight has the potential to sell over a million pay-per-views if HBO promotes it the same way as it did Mayweather-Oscar De La Hoya with the *24/7* weekly training update.

KERWYN ROBINSON
Allen, TX

Stop The Fight!

I was appalled watching Darnell Wilson's sickening kayo of Emmanuel Nwodo. What a disgusting display by the third man in the ring, David Fields, and Nwodo's corner. I love a great knockout as much as the next fight fan, but not when it's delivered to a fighter rendered completely helpless and out on his feet. How Fields can sleep at night is beyond me.

What baffles me the most was how ESPN2's broadcast team was raving about it like it was the best thing ever. What, Teddy, *this* wasn't a time for "Stop this fight, ref!! Stop this fight!"? Unreal. Huge credit should be given to Brian Kenny for (once again) calling it like it is. And spare us the "he was still throwing" argument. When you're in that situation and it's obvious that no one is coming to your rescue (and you can't lay down because in boxing culture such a thing will demonstrate a lack of heart and balls), what the heck else are you supposed to do but punch back?

DAVID NEIMAN
Toronto, Ontario

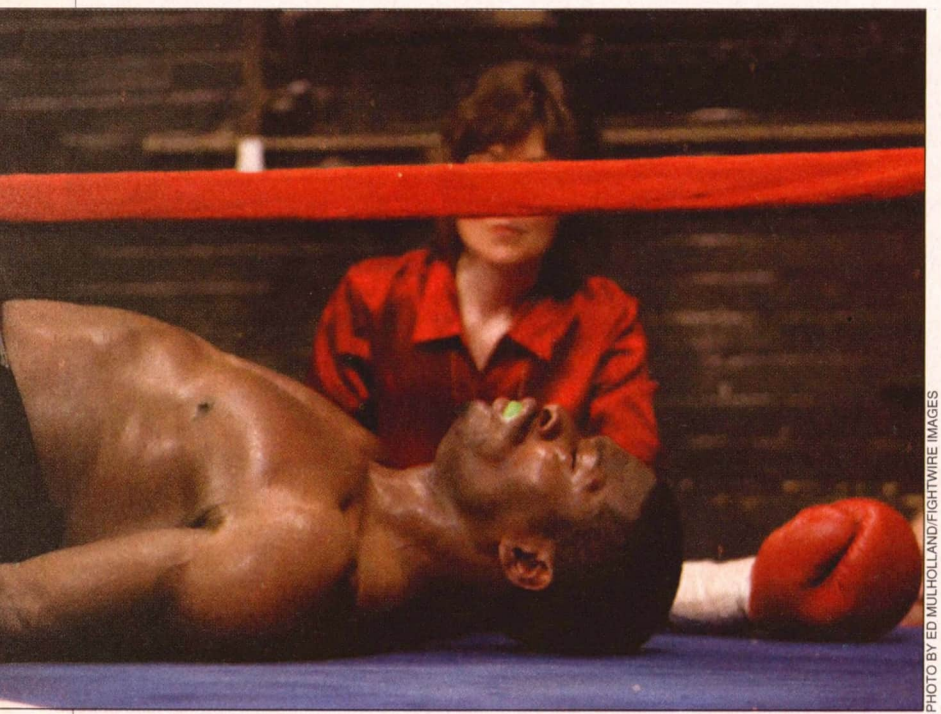


PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Cruiserweight Emmanuel Nwodo is stretched out on the canvas after being knocked out by a vicious left hook from Darnell "The Ding-A-Ling Man" Wilson. While some fans are calling it the Knockout of the Year, reader David Neiman found it "sickening."

Stupid Stats

To me, CompuBox's punch stats are completely absurd. There is no way a human being, unable to see a fight from all angles, can keep track. Yet, according to ESPN2, HBO, and even THE RING, they are set in stone and have no margin for error. I often watch fights where the punch-count numbers appear very misleading. A recent example was the Jermain Taylor-Cory Spinks fight. CompuBox had Taylor well ahead in connects, and Jim Lampley used them to justify the scores of Harold Lederman and two of the official judges. I'm not a Spinks fan, but I think his hand speed made it too difficult to count his connects. I give thumbs up to Showtime for not taking part in this nonsense.

TIM BRINK
Laurel, MD

[Editor's note: While we can't speak for ESPN2 and HBO, THE RING does not consider CompuBox's punch stats "set in stone." They are subject to human error, and they are, as Larry Merchant used to frequently say when HBO first adopted them, "quantitative, not qualitative."]

"Tito" Technicality

In the article in the August 2007 issue of THE RING in which the packag-

ing of Manny Pacquiao to the American public is discussed ("Pac-Man's U.S. Blitz"), writer Don Stradley commented that Duran, Chavez, and Trinidad are generally regarded as the most successful non-American fighters to conquer America.

I take issue with this statement because Trinidad should not be included. As a Puerto Rican, Trinidad is indeed an American. Whether born on the island or the mainland, all Puerto Ricans are American citizens from the moment they are born. This has been a fact since 1917, when President Woodrow Wilson approved the Jones Act.

ERNEST RODRIGUEZ
Nashville, TN

Poor Planning

Attending the International Boxing Hall of Fame induction weekend in Canastota, New York, on the weekend of June 7-10, was a fantastic experience, a high point for any boxing fan fortunate enough to be able to make such a journey. What experience could be better than that? Well, maybe there could have been one: the opportunity to have attended both the Miguel Cotto-Zab Judah welterweight clash at Madison Square Garden *and* the IBHOF. Why such an unfortunate clash of dates for two of boxing's premier events? Surely, I'm not the only fan out there who wanted to be in two places at once.

MIKE PARKER
Auckland, New Zealand

Back To School, Buffer

It's time someone teaches Michael Buffer basic Spanish, since he's making so much money off it. At least someone should explain to him the difference between "r" and "rr." It's not "Barrerra" but Barrera. It's not "Margarrito" but Margarito. It's not "Mirranda" but Miranda. Buffer has a great voice, presence, and delivery, but the classy Jimmy Lennon Jr. is the better announcer because his father (the best ring announcer ever) taught him a valuable lesson: Every man deserves to have his name pronounced properly.

ENRIQUE LOPETEGUI
San Antonio, TX

What About Vitali?

What is THE RING's stance on Vitali Klitschko's return? He's scheduled to fight Jameel McCline in September. If he wins as expected, he'll fight the winner of Oleg Maskaev-Samuel Peter. Will THE RING recognize the winner of Klitschko's fight with the Maskaev-Peter winner as being for the vacant title?

JAMES McDONALD
jm47130@yahoo.com

[With few exceptions, THE RING will only recognize a bout between our number-one and number-two contenders as being for a vacant championship. Therefore, everything depends on where the fighters are ranked going into any match.]

Leading In The Clubhouse

The Miguel Cotto-Zab Judah fight is the best fight of 2007 thus far. It contained all the elements needed for a good fight: drama, blood, fouls, knockdowns, and a dramatic ending. I commend both fighters for their sportsmanship, valor, and tenacity. This fight was so much better than the overhyped De La Hoya-Mayweather superfight!

MATT CHICK
Dover, DE

Some Like Both

It's great that the rise of the UFC has commanded the attention of the sports media. The flipside, however, is that a few gasbags who wouldn't know a key lock from a keyboard suddenly feels it's their obligation to give us their take on mixed martial arts, no matter how uninformed they are.

One such know-it-all, Ivan Goldman, columnist for the critically acclaimed RING magazine, provided his "expert" analysis about a hypothetical fight between Kermit Cintron and Sean Sherk, all the while denigrating the sport of MMA and its fans. Too bad a remote control does not come with my magazine purchase. It took me about two seconds to turn the page, but that's twice as long as I would have liked.

ALEX WILLIAMS
williams@william.jewell.edu ■

PHOTO BY NICK LAHAM/GETTY IMAGES

Miguel Cotto clips Zab Judah with a left during their exciting welterweight bout that attracted a capacity crowd to Madison Square Garden. Reader Matt Chick commends both fighters for giving us what he thinks is, to date, the Fight of the Year.

[Looking Ahead]

By Joe Santoliquito

"Soviet" Civil War

The introduction of many American fight fans to Eastern European boxing came in the form of a fictional character, Ivan Drago, who lost by knockout to Rocky Balboa in *Rocky IV*. Twenty-two years later, the political landscape in that part of the world has changed dramatically, but boxing interest is at an all-time high. Good ol' Ivan would be proud of the fact that seven of the 10 heavyweights ranked by THE RING hail from either Russia or one of the former Soviet republics.

After **Ruslan Chagaev** meets **Sultan Ibragimov**, on October 13, in Moscow, Russia, there could be one less.

Chagaev, 23-0-1 (17), is rated fourth at heavyweight by THE RING, while Ibragimov, 21-0-1 (17), is rated sixth. Both are coming off the most impressive victories of their careers. But if one fighter enters this fight with a slight edge, it's Chagaev, who resides in Hamburg, Germany, but was born in Andizhan, Uzbekistan, a former Soviet republic.

Since March 2006, "The White Tyson" has vanquished three fighters who were or are currently rated in THE RING's top 10, **Vladimir Virchis**, **John Ruiz**, and **Nicolay Valuev**. It was against the previously undefeated Valuev that Chagaev scored his biggest victory, winning the WBA title with a majority decision in April.

In June, Ibragimov won the WBO strap from a listless **Shannon Briggs**, who was nothing more than a walking punching bag. Still, it was a notable victory for the Russian southpaw because prior to that, Ibragimov had faced a who's who of journeymen, including **Ray Austin**, **Lance Whitaker**, **Friday Ahunanya**, and **Zuri Lawrence**.

Taylor And Pavlik

As of press time, the middleweight world championship fight between THE RING's number-three contender, **Kelly Pavlik**, and world champion **Jermain Taylor** was on the verge of being signed for September 29, tentatively set for Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City. Both fighters are undefeated. Both are in the primes of their careers.

This will be the first time Taylor, 27-0-1 (17), has faced a true middleweight since his draw with **Winky Wright** in June 2006. Since then, Taylor's decisioned the undersized **Cory Spinks** and **Kassim Ouma**. "Bad Intentions" has not stopped an opponent in over two years (KO 3 **Daniel Edouard**, February 2005) and is badly in need of a fight that will excite his dwindling fan base.

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Can Pavlik's power stop Taylor, as it did Jose Zertuche?

On the other hand, Pavlik, 31-0 (28), is experiencing the opposite, especially after his seven-round destruction of power-puncher **Edison Miranda** in May.

Mormeck Ready To Meet Haye

Jean-Marc Mormeck, the two-time reigning world cruiserweight champion, will take on heavy-hitter **David Haye** on September 28, in Paris, France, at a site yet to be determined.

Mormeck, 33-3 (22), regained the title when he avenged his fourth-round kayo defeat to **O'Neil Bell** in January 2006 with a narrow points victory in March of this year. Three of his last four victories have been by decision.

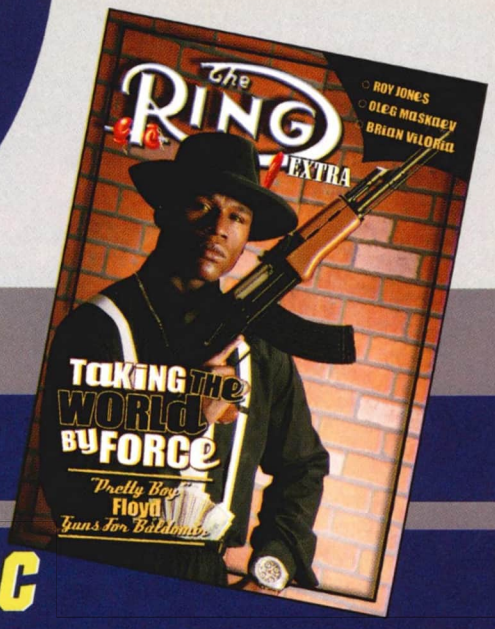
Haye, 19-1 (18), is rated number four by THE RING, but has never faced anyone of Mormeck's caliber. The one time he did step up, he was stopped in the fifth round by grizzled veteran **Carl Thompson**, in 2004. Since that setback, Haye has stopped eight of his last nine opponents. During that same time, Mormeck has beaten, **Wayne Braithwaite**, **Virgil Hill**, and split a pair of bouts with Bell.

The question here is whether or not Haye can withstand Mormeck's punch.

Listen Up

It's been almost three years since **Vitali Klitschko** has been in the ring. But "Dr. Ironfist" is counting on all of his sundry injuries to be healed when he fights **Jameel McCline**, on September 22, in the Olympia Halle, in Munich, Germany. The last time McCline, 38-7-3 (23), fought in Europe, he dislocated his left kneecap late in the third round against then-WBA titlist Nicolay Valuev and had to be taken to his the locker room on a stretcher. Klitschko, 35-2 (34), is hoping to send "Big Time" out of the ring with his fists this time instead of a gimpy knee ... In what could be the biggest fight in Europe in the last decade, super middleweight world champion **Joe Calzaghe**, 43-0 (32), will take on Dane **Mikkel Kessler**, 39-0 (29), on November 3, at Millenium Stadium, in Cardiff, Wales. **Frank Warren**, the promoter of the show, is expecting a live gate of over 60,000. ■

The RING



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